THE IMPULSIVE COUNTERCHANGE: THE DEVELOPMENT AND ARTISTIC EXPRESSION OF MELVILLE'S RELIGIOUS THOUGHT, 1846 - 1857

by

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Date: August 19, 1968

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of Doctor
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In an unorthodox way, Herman Melville was an intensely religious man. He was led almost instinctively to seek the key to stability in a world of constant change in the attempt of religion to transcend human limitations by establishing a personal communion between man and the source of all meaning -- God. The quest for a valid religious faith which Melville carried out in his writings between 1846 and 1857 had a profound effect not only on his vision of the world but on his aesthetic life. It is the purpose of this study to analyze the development of Melville's religious thought during this period and to assess its consequences for his achievement as a writer.

Melville's contrast of civilization and savagery in Typee (1846) is essentially a critique of the effect of religion on man's life. Not only had the South Sea islanders created a society more orderly and humane than many in "Christian" Europe, but the introduction of Christianity into

primitive societies often worked to the moral detriment of the natives. But Melville found that the instinctive passions of the Typees were not an altogether satisfactory substitute for Western hypocrisy. Thus, though the attacks on the Western invasion of the South Seas continue in Omoo (1847), Melville's focus is upon the Christians more than their "victims."

Melville apparently began Mardi (1849) as another adventure story, but he realized during its composition that his real interest in writing lay with the religious, moral, and philosophical problems he had touched upon in Typee and Omoo. Thus he turned Mardi into an allegorical tour of the world, an examination of man's attempt at a rational ordering of his world as well as his religious answers to the mysteries of life. He castigates the hypocrisies and falsehoods of orthodox religion, but four of his five main characters ultimately join a Utopian Christian society. The refusal of the narrator to remain at Serenia, however, indicates Melville's uncertainty about the power of Christianity to enable most men to live moral lives.

Mardi's lack of popularity forced Melville to return to the personal adventure narrative in Redburn (1849) and White-Jacket (1850). Nevertheless, they are important experiments in the mixture of realistic narrative and symbolism which characterizes Moby-Dick. Moreover, by demonstrating to Melville the inability of religion to cope with the world's evil, they led directly to the tentative resolution of his religious turmoil. For during the composition of Moby-Dick (1851), Melville reluctantly rejected as a source of order and meaning a world-view based on the assumption that God directly guides human life and that man can somehow influence Him. Despite his strong admiration for Ahab's recognition and defiance of evil, Melville ultimately rejects his vision as futile and destructive. As an alternative he offers Ishmael's attempt to recreate his subjective experience of Ahab's quest in a form which preserves its inherent meaning and thus to establish a limited but universally valid form of truth.

Melville apparently hoped in Pierre (1852) to translate his resolution from the realm of perception into that of moral action, but he came to the conclusion that there was no point at which man was stable, that his nature was totally chaotic and therefore empty. Not only was moral decision impossible but the creation of artistic unity as well. His confidence in art shattered, Melville ended his career (after five years of writing short fiction) with The Confidence-Man (1857), a somber satire illumined only by man's continuing capacity for dignity in the face of a perverse fate.

PREFACE

My aim in this study has been to tell a story, the story of a man and an artist. I have attempted to trace as precisely as possible the progression of one important aspect of his intellectual life -- his religious thought -- and to relate it to the progress of his artistic life during the years which took him from the writing of a fictionalized travel book to the creation of a literary classic and then into relative obscurity again. I hope that by doing so I have reached a better understanding of Melville's works as a whole and therefore of their creator as well. For we must always keep in mind that an artist is first of all a human being and that we would not be very interested in reading what he wrote if he were not.

Three aspects of my approach may need some slight explanation. First of all, I speak often of the alienation between man's mind and nature and of Melville's attempt to overcome it. I mean nothing more esoteric by "nature" (which I have decided not to capitalize) than the physical universe, the essentially non-human, non-spiritual "other" that man perceives through his senses. Secondly, I have not cited the numerous critics of Melville's work to any great extent. Anyone who has ever studied Melville will know that I could not have written this interpretation without first digesting much of the Melville criticism from the time of R. M. Weaver to that of Paul Brodtkorb. There is no item in my bibliography that has not contributed to my own thinking about Melville; and it is not possible for me to express my indebtedness in the form of footnotes to all those who have been fascinated as I have been by our nineteenth-century American Ishmael. Finally, I have deliberately excluded from the scope of my investigation Melville's poetry (Clarel in particular) and Billy Budd. The difficulties of my handling a new genre and the diffusion of themes in the shorter poetry seem to me to justify their omission. Clarel is certainly important to our understanding of Melville's religious thought, but it lies well outside what I consider to be a relatively self-contained intellectual process between 1846 and 1857. In addition it represents, for the most part, a return to precisely the same considerations that Melville had undertaken in the period under study. On the other hand, Billy Budd seems at times to treat some of Melville's characteristic ideas in a new light. I have serious doubts, however, about the validity of any interpretation of a work separated from The Confidence-Man by thirty-four years which is not supported by a close analysis of the works that intervened. More importantly, it seems to me that Billy Budd tells us less of Melville's final attitude toward life than we would like it to. The moral enigma that Melville offers in the title character and the situation which develops around him is as unresolvable for us, I think, as it seems to have been for Melville. In other words, Melville may very well have ended his life just as he ended his public writing career in 1857 -- bravely confronting total meaninglessness and attempting to wrest from it just the slightest bit of human meaning.

I cannot thank adequately those who, in one way or another, have contributed to my study of Melville -- the fellow students and Melvilleans who have patiently subjected themselves to my ideas and who have reciprocated with many of their own; Professor Arlin Turner, who guided me through my first extended work on Melville; Professor Louis Budd, whose advice helped me avoid problems I would not have foreseen and whose probing questions added immeasurably to my own conception of what I was about; and finally my wife, with her insight, her skillful and fearless editing, and her seemingly inexhaustible patience with my mania. If there is anything in these pages that "a man might rather have done than to have left undone," much of the credit should go to her.

R. F. B.

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THE IMPULSIVE COUNTERCHANGE: THE DEVELOPMENT AND ARTISTIC EXPRESSION OF MELVILLE'S RELIGIOUS THOUGHT,

1846 - 1857

INTRODUCTION

"And Rolfe is sterling, though not less
At variance with that parlor-strain
Which counts each thought that borders pain
A social treason. Sterling -- yes,
Despite illogical wide range
Of brain and heart's impulsive counterchange."

(Clarel, II, xxi, 132-137.)

Herman Melville was a religious man. Any critic of his art ignores this fact at his peril; sooner or later he must acknowledge that Melville's religious consciousness permeates, though it does not always dominate, every aspect of his thought and art. Indeed this very human, sometimes blatantly irreverent man might claim the right of being called "religious" with greater justice than many whose views have been more orthodox and external actions more exemplary. The religious views of most of us intrude upon our mundane opinions and actions primarily in the realm of personal morality, if at all. But for Melville, religious considerations provided much of the fuel for the furnace of his intense inner and outer life, feeding but not always brightening the fires of his metaphysical, political, ethical, and social thought. Most naturally then, since most of Melville's varied interests were focused upon the creation of literature, the religious quest became not only a major theme but an important source of his art. And it is the central contention of this study that Melville's growing consciousness of his role as an artist was paralleled and reinforced by an increase in the scope and intensity of his religious thought; that these two processes came to a climax in Moby-Dick; that this simultaneity was not a fortuitous one, since by the time of Moby-Dick the results of both streams of thought had merged; and that Melville's resolution of his religious doubts through his conception of art disintegrated in Pierre, leading in part to the end of his public writing career in 1857.

If this view of Melville's writing between 1846 and 1857 is to be established as a valid one, two fundamental critical problems will have to be dealt with. The first is to characterize as briefly but as precisely as possible the nature of Melville's shifting religious views. This is a delicate undertaking; for, because of the ubiquity of religious speculation in Melville's thought, it is a temptation to view every statement, every image, every symbol as an essentially religious one. But to do this, as some critics have done, is to be unfair to Melville as an artist. No writer of the stature which we usually grant to Melville could have portrayed human life from a single point of view, even one as Protean in nature as Melville's conception of religion. Thus I will be at least as interested in viewing Melville's religion in the context of his total work as in exploring the work in the context of his religion.

The second factor in tracing the development of Melville's religious thought is to relate it to his artistic life by what he says in his letters, by what others said about him, and finally by the way in which he embodies his religious ideas in the writings themselves. Naturally, since I am primarily concerned with Melville's religious quest and its role in his works, I will not attempt a full-scale analysis of his artistic achievement in each book. I will concern myself, however, with Melville's opinion of himself as an artist at various points in his early career as well as in the manner in which his religious thought is expressed in a specifically artistic context. It is important to note at this point that I do not consider Melville's books vehicles through which he communicated his opinions on life and afterlife. Rather the books of the first ten years of Melville's literary life are best seen as a natural outgrowth of the intellectual and emotional expansion of a profoundly creative personality. In other words Melville used his medium as a means of quest as well as communication. Not only were his novels reflections of an awakening and capacious mind, but they became a way for Melville to grapple with the problems created when that mind broke through conventional patterns of thought and belief. Melville seen in this light is less an "immoderate and importunate seeker of truth"[1] in his books than a man driven to write, always to write, by a tumultuous personal development and a teeming imagination. His peculiar experiences and talents had opened up to him realities unseen by his more orthodox countrymen; and he employed his novels to bring himself and his readers closer to this "brave new world," to probe into its depths through the process of artistic creation. Thus Melville, while he belongs to that select group of novelists properly called "metaphysical," should be viewed as a professional writer above all, in the sense that Emerson was not one. Emerson saw his books neither as struggles toward truth not yet attained nor as his main occupation in life. For Melville, however, his books were the primary medium of intellectual and emotional quest; he desired, therefore, to make them the means of support for himself and his family.

Yet this professional writer from New York and the Berkshires was one of a small number of contemporaries, "a chain of God's posts around the world,"[1] men fated by their spot in time and their particular talents to be seers of the yet unseen. For example, just before and during the period covered by this study, an eccentric young "professional writer" in Copenhagen was thinking and writing about some of the same social and religious conditions which interested Melville so deeply.[2] Melville was not the conscious "isolato" that Kierkegaard was, and their conclusions were different -- significantly so. But both men were skillful though amateur students of psychology. Both saw the Protestant heritage of their youth fading into insignificance in the hearts of the masses and the minds of the intelligentsia, and both questioned the value of that heritage as it had been passed down to their time. Both were granted more than one glimpse into the inhuman abyss which lay behind the pallid veil of conventional thought, and both saw the necessity of facing rather than hiding from this enemy to human life. Thus Melville was not altogether alone in his vision. But he could not know this, and he became the Ishmael by necessity that Kierkegaard was by choice. Given the hundred years of thought which has developed from the beginnings of Kierkegaard and men like him, and living in a world that Melville in a sense foresaw, we should be able to discuss the religious quest begun in 1846 with more clarity, perhaps, than Melville could have managed while he was living through it. And having attempted this, we will be in a position to recognize more fully the skill with which this lonely and, to an extent, "unsourced" search was carried out in the realm of art. To these two tasks, the clarification of thought and the critical appreciation of artistry, this study addresses itself.

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[1] William Ellery Sedgwick, Herman Melville: The Tragedy of Mind (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1945), p. 9.

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[1] The Letters of Herman Melville, edited by Merrell R. Davis and William H. Gilman (New Haven, 1960), p. 132.

[2] I do not intend to offer a Kierkegaardian interpretation of Melville, but it is helpful at times to place Melville's thought in a context similar to but different from his own. And Kierkegaard provides just such a context.

Chapter I

TREMORS AND GROUNDSWELLS

Ah!
These under-formings in the mind.
Banked corals which ascend from far,
But little heed men that they wind
Unseen, unheard -- till lo, the reef --
The reef and breaker, wreck and grief.

(Clarel, I, i, 74-79.)

Given the nature of the present study, it may seem superfluous to note at this point the fact that Melville was a writer whose personal commitment to what he was writing was intense. But the point should be emphasized. Among the many forces which contribute to the transformation of an imaginative layman into a practicing novelist, the need to let his ideas expand and take shape within the form of art was central to Melville's creativity. His desire was not only (or even primarily) to communicate, but to give some shape to the constantly shifting problems, attitudes, and resolutions engendered by his powerful mind. Thus, as I shall attempt to show, he took as much from each book as he had put into it originally.

An interesting contrast to Melville, a man immersed in the content as well as the form of his art, is his friend Hawthorne. Both men were authors of integrity and skill; both obviously saw in art a value deep enough to command their most profound attention. But Hawthorne was not a man to risk everything upon a single throw of the dice, be the prize a book or a friend. He clearly saw with alarm that this was exactly what Melville was prone to do time after time. In Hawthorne's stories and novels we sense a man of great reserve, a man who can deal with the deepest passions of the soul without allowing his own soul to drown in them, a man who can show his readers an abyss of "blackness ten times black" without danger of his slipping into it. Charles Feidelson contends that Hawthorne's habitual use of allegory as opposed to Melville's tendency toward symbolism springs from this very difference between the two, that Hawthorne found in allegory a barrier against the powers which his own art released.[1]

Perhaps one reason for the cooling of the Melville-Hawthorne friendship is that Melville never really understood this aspect of his fellow writer, that he always tended to interpret Hawthorne's actions in the light of a Melvillean mentality. In "Hawthorne and His Mosses" he notes that some of Hawthorne's scenes allow us to "enter a little way into the intricate, profound heart where they originated. And we see that suffering, some time or other and in some shape or other -- this only can enable any man to depict it in others."[2] Sophia Hawthorne was happy that someone had finally seen the depth of her husband's heart, but she was puzzled at the assumption which ends this passage.[3] Yet many years after Hawthorne's death Melville repeated his "insight" to Julian Hawthorne: " . . . he told me, during our talk, that he was convinced that there was some secret in my father's life which had never been revealed, and which accounted for the gloomy passages in his books. It was characteristic in him to imagine so; there were so many secrets untold in his own career."[1] Hawthorne is correct here in assuming that Melville's comment throws more light on the speaker than on the elder Hawthorne. Hawthorne apparently brought little of his personal life to his writing, except perhaps for those deepest psychological sources of creativity which must forever remain obscure to us. The "secrets" of a writer as personal as Melville, however, are important to our understanding of his work, although those "secrets" relevant to Melville's religious thought may not be those spoken of by Julian Hawthorne. What is involved in the formation of Melville's religious sensibilities is not a single event but the whole context of his culture, his society, his family, and his early experiences. It is this context that we must explore; for, as Kierkegaard would have reiterated had he known Melville: " . . . a poet purchases the power of words, the power of uttering all the dread secrets of others, at the price of a little secret he is unable to utter . . . and a poet is not an apostle, he casts out devils only by the power of the devil."[2]

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[1] Charles Feidelson, Jr., Symbolism and American Literature (Chicago, 1953), p. 20.

[2] Herman Melville, "Hawthorne and His Mosses," in Moby-Dick (Norton Critical Edition), edited by Harrison Hayford and Herschel Parker (New York, 1967), p. 539.

[3] Jay Leyda, The Melville Log (2 vols.; New York, 1951), I, 392.

The Historical Situation

Before Ahab, Ishmael, and Pierre came to be, Melville was. But to understand fully the religious and philosophical context in which Melville was forced to conduct his lonely quest, the context which in fact made the quest necessary, one would have to undertake a survey of the major streams of Western thought since the Middle Ages. Though a man who appears to us in so many ways far ahead of his age, Melville is after all a man _of_ his times. Heir to a process which had been going on for several hundred years, he was merely one of the first to recognize the implications of its legacy. At the risk of distorting the complexity of their development, therefore, I will attempt to survey the philosophical and religious concepts after 1700 which seem relevant to Melville's situation.[1]

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[1] Julian Hawthorne, Hawthorne and His Circle (New York, 1903), p. 33.

[2] Soren Kierkegaard, Fear and Trembling, translated by Walter Lowrie (New York, 1954 [orig. 1941]), p. 72.

During the eighteenth century there occurred a significant shift of thought away from the various _a priori_ systems of the seventeenth. In the earlier century it was assumed that God stood at the center of the universe, not only as Creator but as source of all order, all knowledge. Philosophers began with the idea that the mind was endued by God with the full plan of the universe and that their task was to unfold the system, into which all "facts" would then fall. Or one could rid one's mind of all extraneous knowledge, as did Descartes, and, protected by the concept of a God who insured that man's mind could comprehend the "other," work out the organization of reality from its beginning. In the eighteenth century a subtle but vital change in positions took place. God was still the necessary center of the universe, but his role in the process of knowing no longer loomed so large as it had. Man no longer deduced the structure of reality from the premise of God. Rather he broke the body of empirical observation into its smallest components, thus revealing the inherent order of reality, and then reconstructed it according to the discovered system.

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[1] I am indebted in this brief survey to Ernst Cassirer's _The Philosophy of the Enlightenment_, translated by Fritz C. A. Koelln and James C. Pettegrove (Boston, 1955, [orig. 1951]).

Thus, though Newton insisted that God was established more firmly as the Ruler of the world, the "working center" of reality had shifted to the mind of man. The effects of this concept upon man's religious consciousness were extensive. God the Creator, the Old Testament God, receded far into the background of the life of the mind; and man modestly assumed that He would remain forever a Being unapproachable by the power of the intellect. Revelation seemed a less necessary adjunct to scientific and philosophical inquiry than it had formerly. Doctrine was now considered part of the materia facta which offered itself to man's mind, data to be "tested by reason and accepted only if found to be in accord with the rational design of the universe as comprehended by man's mind."[1] Man was no longer forced to peer through religious spectacles to see into nature. The Cartesian dualism was overcome by the ability of the mind to reconstruct the world from the pieces into which it had been broken. God was in His heaven, and man controlled his world.

Man, moreover, had taken on a new dignity through a change in the meaning of "reason." The mind was no longer either a blank sheet to be filled with mere sense data or a static gridwork pre-arranged for the orderly filing of that same data. Since reason was seen as a process of becoming, a power reaching out past frontier after frontier, mankind could not be considered a stable entity. Progress became an everyday reality rather than an irreligious dream. The possibilities of education were endless; and each man, in that he possessed the marvelous power of reason, participated in the dignity and freedom of all. Man seemed well on his way, within limits that were clearly recognized and admitted, to a Utopian existence.

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[1] Merle Curti, The Growth of American Thought, 3rd ed. (New York, 1964), p. 99.

Somehow, man never reached Utopia. We need not wait for Melville's distrust of the "head," or his more specific skepticism regarding science, to see reflected the failure of the Age of Reason, the age of the scientific method. Two lines of thought developed within the eighteenth century which prophesied the destruction of its brilliant edifice of rationality. As I have noted, eighteenth-century rationalists specifically avoided claiming miraculous powers for the mind. They insisted that reason has definite limits, that man "can never know completely anything really elementary or absolutely primary."[1] This seemingly innocent and sensible principle, however, led Enlightenment man into an impasse. Newton moved away from the concept of God, the plenum of reality, as the necessary source and center of knowledge; rather he employed a method that worked from apparent disorder to discovered order, from a chaos of facts to the principles inherent in them. Gone was the process of deduction from universal laws which were, by definition, the very essence of reality. Gone was the necessity to trouble oneself with the Cartesian duality, since man deliberately renounced the knowledge of the noumenon for the more certain ground of phenomena. The "world of mind," as Melville was later to call a much different state of being, became the only real world to which man could aspire: "Know then thyself, presume not God to scan; / The proper study of Mankind is Man."

But "Man" seems to have been an entity that fascinated and attracted mankind in order to lure it into a trap, to enmesh the mind in a web of its own making. For what happens when man, in his search for knowledge, abandons the security of God's eternal unity and aims only to remain within phenomena and discover their inherent order? As Cassirer puts it: "[H]ow can we rely on the truth of this system, or on the existence of such an order at all? Where is the guarantee, the decisive proof, that at least this general system of phenomena is completely self-contained, homogeneous and uniform?"[1] When the eighteenth century was little more than half over, these very questions were posed and answered in a startling way. Carrying Descartes' mind-world dualism to its logical conclusion and accepting the Enlightenment assumption that man's exploration of his world is circumscribed by the limits of his perceptions, David Hume could only answer that man was inextricably trapped within himself, that there was no proof of the order which he sees in nature, that in fact this order was more probably imposed than inherent. Thus the first witch-baby spawned by the Enlightenment turned on its sire and beat him to his knees with his own weapons. And the eighteenth century ended with the philosophy of Kant, which not only trapped man within his own knowing processes but also limited him to his own subjective perception of morality. Alienated from God as well as from the rest of the noumenon, he had to substitute for a morality based on revelation or religious teaching Kant's "categorical imperative" to duty.

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[1] Paraphrased from Voltaire in Cassirer, p. 54.

A second intellectual aspect of the eighteenth century was less a source of the demise of Enlightenment philosophy than a warning that its death was nearer than anyone could have realized. The Sentimentalism of Shaftesbury and Mackenzie, with its emphasis upon emotions and instincts, seems at first to be a freak in the "Age of Reason"; but like the philosophy of Hume, this movement often began with common Enlightenment concepts and extended them to their limits. The Sentimentalists turned the eighteenth century's faith in the powers of education into a belief in man's total perfectibility, turned the rejection of "natural depravity" into the assumption that man and nature are essentially good, turned the reaffirmation of the basic equality of men into a movement toward the abolition of structured society. The writings of the Sentimentalists stand as a double warning to the Enlightenment: first, that it had paid too little attention to much in human nature that is valuable and powerful; and second, that it may have overlooked elements of nature which lie beyond the reason's limit and control. Unfortunately neither the Enlightenment nor Sentimentalism heeded the second admonition. Voltaire was too late with his condemnation of sentimental optimism, for the seeds of this view lay within the very philosophy that he represented. The Age of Reason ended with an event that would have horrified Voltaire, an historical cataclysm which gave the death-blow to Enlightenment thought -- the French Revolution. In a few years this proving ground of eighteenth-century concepts had become a bloodbath, a monument, in part, to the very forces in human nature (and by extension in all creation) which the rationalist had thought were well under control.

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[1] Cassirer, p. 56.

This, then, was the heritage handed by the eighteenth century to the nineteenth -- particularly, as far as this study is concerned, to nineteenth-century England. For the English Romantics are the children of the French Revolution and the Victorians the heirs of the Romantics. A useful teleological definition of the Romantic movement is that it was a reaction against the completeness with which the rationalist philosophy was set forth. Like the sentimentalists, the Romantics found little room in the rationalist system for the full exercise of the human dignity affirmed by the Enlightenment itself. But the Romantics differed from the sentimental school in that they refused to accept even the premises of the eighteenth century. They found the rationalist position so unaccommodating, so tightly constructed, that they rebelled against it *in toto*. Just as philosophers after Kant tended to ignore his use of categories as mediators between man's mind and the phenomenal world and to emphasize their transcendent use to put man in communion with the noumenon, the Romantics felt the need to establish a direct relationship with nature in its fullest and most real form. Distrustful of the mediating role of religion, and hating the analytical process of eighteenth-century "reason," they introduced into literary and philosophical usage a concept foreign to their predecessors -- imaginative creation. They saw the world, not as a collection of facts organized in some heretofore obscure pattern, but as an organic whole, a living unity of which they were part. It was only in the context of this totality that truth came to be. In Wordsworth's *The Prelude* or "Intimations" ode, for example, truth is not a pre-existent quality or object to be discovered but the product of an organic cooperation between the meaning inherent in living nature and the active, formative energy of man's imagination. With the rise of this concept of the imagination, the Cartesian dualism seemed overcome; and an age-old dream of man appeared to be near realization -- the dream of unity. For in the poetic process the imagination attained a synthesis between unity (organic nature) and multiplicity (the individualized imagination), between objectivity and subjectivity. No longer alien from nature, moreover, man was united with man as an organic and creative part of the world's totality.

There is not space enough in this study for a critique of the aspects of the Romantic movement mentioned here. But it is important to note two problems which, appearing at the beginning and the end of the period, caused large gaps to appear in the hastily assembled structure of Romantic thought.

Hovering over the English Romantics from before the start of their poetic activity was the specter of the French Revolution. The Romantics placed even more emphasis on the individual man than did the rationalist thinkers of the previous century. Though they did not posit for the imagination the uniformity in all men that the Enlightenment claimed for "reason," the Romantics felt that the energy of the imagination represented the deepest power of the human soul. As such, the imagination was able to raise human nature to a semi-divine level, to rescue man from a slavish subservience to the phenomenal world as well as to his own worst instincts. But the history of the Revolution -- from the original joy at the overthrow of tyranny, through the Reign of Terror, the European wars and counter-wars, to the accession and finally the defeat of Napoleon -- all this represented the triumph of the very evils which the Romantics hoped could be eradicated. Ultimately the major Romantics were unable to blind themselves completely to the evil in human nature, and their struggles to maintain a faith in man's goodness and his power to improve himself had divergent outcomes. Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Southey became political and religious conservatives. Byron projected himself as a skeptical, almost cynical railer against human society. And Shelley found it necessary to end _Prometheus Unbound_, a lyrical prophecy of the triumph of man's spirit over those powers which enslave it, with a warning that the victory was likely to be impermanent.

The second failing of the Romantics was that they, like the rationalists and sentimentalists before them, ignored the sharkish ferocity to be found everywhere in nature. Most of them demonstrated their _awareness_ of this aspect of creation. But, like the orthodox Christian who sees in misfortune the hand of an ultimately beneficent God, the Romantic poets affirmed the ability of the imagination to assimilate, understand, and thus control nature's seeming wildness. Thus all the major Romantics turned with gladness from the spectacle of man's folly to the unruffled serenity of nature. To Wordsworth and Coleridge it was an unchanging source of joy. To Shelley it seemed the irrefutable prophecy of the fulfillment of his dreams. To Byron it was a refuge from the hate and hypocrisy of the world: "But let me quit Man's works, again to read / His Maker's, spread around me."[1] Romanticism had tended, by its radical individualism and its almost inevitable disillusion with humanity, to isolate men from each other even more than previous ages had done. But it had left them with a solace in the direct communion with nature.

The Victorians, however, found that comfort snatched from them with terrifying swiftness. We need not be surprised at the intensity of the Victorians' reaction to Darwin's announcement of his theory of evolution and the corresponding reaffirmation of the scientific spirit. Revelation had said: God made and ordered the world for man's benefit. Evolution showed that the world "ran itself," that no benefit accrued to those too weak to survive. The Enlightenment had said: Order exists, and the coordination of analysis and synthesis will reveal it. Evolution was demonstrable by precisely this system and showed the world's organization to be that of perpetual battle. Byron had said: "Is it not better, then, to be alone, / And love Earth only for its earthly sake?"[2] Evolution revealed to the Victorians that they were indeed alone, and at bay, facing an earth "red in tooth and claw." Romanticism had said: Look into yourself and follow the guides you find there, for you can corroborate their validity by relating them to Nature. Evolution made the Victorians unable to do anything but look into themselves, but also it made them afraid that they might in fact find a chaos in themselves comparable to that in the universe. It is no wonder that they failed to hear the small voice of the melioristic Darwin when he said that his theory actually reaffirmed the power and majesty of God. The age of Newton was gone forever.

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[1] The Selected Poetry of Lord Byron, edited by Leslie Marchand (New York, 1951), p. 101.

[2] Ibid., p. 90.

The results of the Victorian effort to cope with a world suddenly alien to them are not always attractive to the rigorously skeptical modern mind. We find great intellect, great sensitivity, great technical skill, and much "high seriousness" in the last three-quarters of the nineteenth century. We find very little, however, of Kierkegaard's desperate faith or Melville's courage-to-be-faithless. The courageous conversion of Newman to Catholicism and the equally demanding skepticism of Clough are but two lonely attempts to grapple with a new reality in a general atmosphere of fear, escape, and indifference. But it was an age of Arnold and Tennyson, not Newman and Clough, that was forming as Herman Melville returned from the South Seas to an America optimistically concerned with its national destiny. Melville, looking beyond his nation's "Indian summer sunlight," saw the shadows of an alien world lengthening over his life and the life of his countrymen. It was in this world that Melville sought to live and write.

When Melville began a search for order in a world that appeared inherently chaotic, for human meaning in a universe which seemed made merely for the exercise of brute power, could he hope to find in the religious heritage into which he was born the solutions to his spiritual and intellectual problems? The answer is that liberal Protestantism of Melville's day had reached an impasse similar to that which we have described in philosophy, that for Melville Christianity in general was unable to cope with a world bearing little resemblance to that of Luther's or Calvin's age. Let us survey briefly those elements in the development of the Protestant movement in general and American Protestantism in particular that account for the failure of Christianity to illumine the darkening world of Herman Melville.[1]

Perhaps ~~the~~ simplest reason why Protestant Christianity seemed to Melville and some of his contemporaries inadequate to resolve the philosophical dilemma which was emphasized rather than created by the findings of science -- the problem of man's alienation from his fellows, his world, and his God -- is that Protestant thought had tended to reinforce, not counteract, the movement of philosophy and science since the Reformation. Luther's break with the monolithic Church of Rome, and the defections which followed it, planted in the Protestant movement the seeds of a new attitude toward man's relationship to God. The act of faith and God's free response to it were emphasized. The "good work," which had been made acceptable to God through the mediation of the Church, was rejected as a primary means of salvation. Protestantism made the Bible a major source of religious instruction and guidance and, in many cases, opened its pages to the individual interpretation of the laity. The sacraments -- church-administered "bridges" between God and man -- were invariably reduced in number, those remaining often stripped of their specifically "sacramental" qualities. These features of early Protestantism taken together affirm quite clearly the inviolability of man's individual relationship with the Deity. Doctrinally speaking, the Protestant layman may have been considered naturally depraved before God; he may have been burdened by an authoritarianism even more extensive than that of Rome; but he was forced to meet his Creator more on his own than as part of a church.

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[1] Naturally, I intend in this discussion neither a full description nor a critique of Protestant thought (if indeed such a thing actually exists). I am merely interested in those elements in the development of Protestant Christianity which seem to contribute to Melville's peculiar religious consciousness.

The concept of man's unmediated relationship with God, however, posed some problems which could not have been foreseen by Reformation leaders who inhabited the s~~m~~nug universe created by Catholic philosophers. Renaissance man asserted the freedom and dignity of the individual that orthodox Christianity of all types had so often denied. And the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries saw the development of a liberal Protestant thought to support this new appreciation of human nature. The more man explored his world, as we have seen, the more he felt able to understand and control it. Scientific and philosophical discoveries were seen by most men as further additions to God's glory presented to Him by His highest earthly creation. But as I have pointed out, Enlightenment thought and the Romantic reaction to it more and more undermined God's position in man's life. The concept of God, therefore, simultaneously shifted in two directions. Because of the emphasis upon direct relationship of the individual with God, He seemed to move closer to mankind, to be within their reach when they needed Him. But in the process He became more anthropomorphic, and this familiarity bred certain types of contempt. His immanence in the affairs of man made Him appear at times more like a meddling demon than a transcendent Deity. Sect after sect was formed in the conviction that its members knew exactly what God desired man to be and do. These developments sound uncomfortably like traits of the medieval Church against which Reformation leaders rebelled. Yet it cannot be denied that the attitudes which I have described are observable in

Melville's religious views, views which throw orthodox opinion into relief by their very disorientation from orthodoxy.

The second movement of the concept of God was away from man and his world. God as Creator, as Transcendence, was no longer of major importance to man in his investigation of his own nature and that of creation. In this aspect of His being, God could easily be dismissed as the Unknown, the repositor of eternal secrets, and be relegated to a position so far from man's consciousness as to become a virtual non-reality. Like a pair of lines drawn in opposite directions on the earth, these two developments in man's consciousness of God eventually met. The result of both was not only the implicit denial of God's effective transcendence but His displacement as the dominant force in man's existence. The new center, of course, was man himself. This new-found freedom of man unto himself could take many directions. One could become a social and political revolutionary, as Shelley and Byron were in part. One could become a reformer of one sort or another, an activist dedicated to the progress of mankind. Such a man often conceived of God merely as the abstraction of Justice, Democracy, or other human ideals. Or one could use his freedom along with others to construct a system of social and moral strictures whose origin is religious but whose applications and sanctions are controlled by men. But this was a conventional morality indistinguishable from more orthodox, more authoritarian Christianity.

This is a somber picture of the religious life of Melville's time, but it is one that Melville and a few contemporaries found appallingly accurate. Man felt free to rule his world, and rule it he did without the help of God. But the freedom that he accepted so complacently was an unalloyed blessing only if he truly had control over himself and nature. During the nineteenth century, a few lonely men around the world began to perceive something terrible below the surface of man's calm sea that he could not control. Kierkegaard felt forced to break his engagement to be married, and he saw it. Melville went to Liverpool and on a whaling trip to the South Seas, and he saw it. The Victorians read Darwin, and they saw it. Dostoevsky saw it and wrote Notes from the Underground. Near the end of Melville's life, Nietzsche saw it and wrote: God is dead! Dionysius lives!

What all of these writers recognized was that, for better or worse, man had left himself utterly alone in the universe. If in fear he reached out for God (now in fact a dual one), he was likely to be disappointed. For, one "God" he would discover enshrined beyond a chasm of uncontrollable brute power and irrationality; and the other "God" would be too close to man himself, in fact no better or worse than the best efforts of man to be fully himself. Man had atomized himself, cut himself off from God and nature, for the sake of freedom. But that freedom was now become a deadly danger, a burden that not even the Deity could remove from Christian's back. Thus these few saw that most men hid from the freedom that they had made the center of their being and thus that their lives had become a tissue of convention. Those unable to hide were forced to look with fear where men had for years looked with confidence -- into themselves. And to their horror they found for an answer a reflection of the macrocosm in all its chaos.

Unfortunately, the specifically American course of Protestant thought offered Melville no fully satisfactory solution for the situation we have seen developing in his time and extending beyond it. It cannot be denied that the dominant religious culture of the northeastern section of the nation, that of the Puritans, contributed much to the character, spiritual and secular, of the country as a whole. It is generally agreed that the writers of the "American Renaissance" drew heavily upon the legacy of the

Puritans, perhaps almost instinctively. Melville, for example, seems to share the Puritans' habit of seeing a meaning beneath the surface of external events, of seeing life in general as a subtle but constant battle between good and evil. Melville also followed the Puritans in their insistence that life is a quest for salvation, a search bringing into play all the faculties of man. Neither Melville nor the Puritan employed the mind merely to satisfy intellectual curiosity; for both it was a means of probing the world around them for signs -- signs of order, signs of meaning. And both Melville and the Puritan saw a place for literature in their quest (though they would have disagreed on the importance of that place). Kenneth Murdock's explanation of the Puritans' concept of literature could also be applied to Melville's: "They formed and applied [a literary] theory in an attempt to answer the old riddle of how infinite and eternal verity is to be expressed in the finite terms comprehensible to mortal man."[1]

But, aside from this and other contributions to American culture by American religious groups, it must have seemed to Melville that he had but two choices if he were to adopt a contemporary religious point of view as his own. He could take up some form of conventional Christian belief, for example that of the Dutch Reformed Church into which he was baptized. But, though he retained many of the ethical and theological attitudes of orthodox religion, Melville could not accept the settled confidence in doctrine and the hypocritical application of moral judgment that he saw around him. He was offered a second choice in a body of thought -- Transcendentalism -- which was the result of an historical process parallel to those I have already discussed.

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[1] Kenneth Murdock, Literature and Theology in Colonial New England (New York, 1963 [orig. 1949]), p. 65.

Professor Murdock notes that "the seventeenth century began in unshaken confidence that the universe was centered on God and that religion was the heart of life."[1] As we have seen, these beliefs gradually broke down during the period between the advent of the Puritans in America and Melville's time. It is true that the mass of Melville's contemporaries still formally espoused them, but they did so with much less intensity than the Puritans, whose stern adherence to abstract moral principle was at the same time their greatest strength and worst failing. Ironically, it must have been the actions of his fellow Christians that first awoke Melville to the fact that the seventeenth-century "truth" accepted by his countrymen was no longer a living truth. For the Puritans had weakened gradually over a long period of time. The Great Awakening helped to undermine a theocracy already debilitated by the lack of strong leadership. Moreover, this widespread religious revival, because of its emotionalism, militated against the brilliant attempt of its defender, Jonathan Edwards, to unite all aspects of human life under a necessitarian doctrine. The considered rationality of Edwards could not maintain itself against the frenzied spontaneity of a movement that, however black its theology, inevitably left in its wake those who wished to be free not only from Puritan theocracy but from Puritan theology.

The most important products of a Puritanism emancipated by the "new science" and other factors were the Unitarians, "children of the Age of Reason," as Murdock calls them.[2] The Unitarians did indeed espouse many of the concepts of the Enlightenment. They absolved man of the charge of natural depravity, granted him full freedom of intellectual inquiry, and made his conscience the sole guide of his actions. But they also followed the Protestant tendency away from mediation to the extreme of denying the divinity of Christ. Thus the immanent God, the major bridge across a widening gulf between God and man, was gone. It was only natural, then, that when the Unitarians themselves settled into complacency, those who rebelled against them would look to man himself for the divinity lost to the world. Having surveyed the general tendency of philosophical and religious thought in the period, we should not be surprised to find the Transcendentalists using Christ as an example of what all men are, essentially, and substituting for a transcendent Deity a hazy abstraction.

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[1] Murdock, p. 5. [2] *Ibid.*, p. 157.

Transcendentalism (along with the liberal Protestantism from which it sprang), Melville's second choice, was therefore no more acceptable to him than the first was. His criticisms of Emerson are well known, and some of them will be discussed later. But Melville's main objection to Transcendentalism was in its attempt to reestablish the man-nature relationship by making man semi-divine. Melville might accept in part the Romantic concept that the "world" is an entity half-perceived and half-created, but he could never admit the reality of the control which Emerson assumed man exercised over that world. Melville was at all times aware that the world which we perceive is as real as that which we create around us, and that it is the undeniable existence of the "Not-Me" that will forever prove a stumbling block in man's search for stability and certainty. Thus, though Melville might agree with Emerson that man has the spark of divinity in him, he would contend that inextricably mixed with divinity are forces which inevitably limit and frustrate man's every attempt to lift himself free of a world of process. It is for this reason that greatness, in Melville's view, is always tragic.

Out of this tension between the two elements of man's nature and the corresponding dual world that he inhabits man must work out his salvation. On the basis of this concept, we begin to perceive the nature of Melville's reaction to the situation I have outlined. Melville saw clearly that the challenge confronting the religious world-view of his age could not be ignored. Years later he would write of the "Age of the Antonines":

> The sting was not dreamed to be taken from death,
> No Paradise pledged or sought,
> But they reasoned of fate at the flowing feast,
> Nor stifled the fluent thought.
> We sham, we shuffle while faith declines,--
> They were frank in the Age of the Antonines.[1]

He even came in later years to believe not only that faith had declined but that there were elements in Protestant thought which led to the complacent acceptance of a godless, orderless world. In Clarel Rolfe makes a harsh accusation:

> Rome and the Atheist have gained:
> These two shall fight it out -- these two;
> Protestantism being retained
> For base of operations sly
> By Atheism.
>
> (II, xxvi, 143-147.)[2]

Melville would not accept such a world without an effort to find an answer to its apparent meaninglessness. James Baird, in his suggestive study of Melville, contends that the development of Protestant thought down to the Existentialists of our age exhibits the "sickness of over-reason,"[3] and that Melville turned to the basically emotional symbols of primitivism as a substitute for a defunct religious heritage. I shall discuss Baird's central thesis in more detail later, but it is well to point out here that to Melville's artistic imagination the failure of Protestant Christianity to appeal to man's deepest emotional wellsprings was significant. Christian beliefs seemed to have lost "their power to evoke artistic statements in which they are subsumed in a valid religious emotion and become supreme abstractions of feeling."[1] Moreover, modern liberal thought had stripped the religion of the imaginative appeal that remained after the Protestant abandonment of sacraments. Melville writes in 1857: "Heartily wish Niebuhr & Strauss to the dogs. -- The deuce take their penetration & acumen. They have robbed us of the bloom. If they have undeceived anyone -- no thanks to them."[2] Melville is not trying here to "make a sentiment serve need."[3] He is saying that the Christianity that he knows has ignored something real -- something, therefore, that he cannot fully recapture. It has systematically destroyed the human, mythological significance which should surround religious truths. For Melville, if religious truth cannot be proved upon the pulses of the individual, it is in fact not truth.

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[1] The Selected Poems of Herman Melville, edited by Hennig Cohen (New York, 1964), p. 146.

[2] Herman Melville, Clarel, edited by Walter Bezanson (New York, 1960).

[3] James Baird, Ishmael (Baltimore, 1956), p. 22.

Baird is not completely correct in his analysis of Melville's attitude toward contemporary Christianity, however. It is true, as he contends, that Melville's deepest emotional and intellectual instincts seem to point toward the attempt to resolve the world's chaos in some sort of religious synthesis. But he does not reject the intellectual spirit of the Protestant movement; and, though his symbols are emotionally charged, they were formed in the course of a quest which involved both head and heart.

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[1] Baird, p. 17.

[2] Journal of a Visit to Europe and the Levant, edited by Howard Horsford (Princeton, 1955), p. 268.

[3] Clarel, I, xxvii, 69-71.

In fact, the tensions which transform Melville's religious attitude into art are not between intellect and emotion. I have already noted in Melville the recognition of a dual motion in man's nature -- a tension between the world as we experience it (which includes the self) and the world as we attempt to order it. Parallel to this dichotomy is another which forms one of the bases of his art. On the one hand, Melville feels, man must try to establish a communion with himself and the physical universe. He must accept the paradoxes, accept the evil mixed with good, accept the irrationality, and accept the uncertainty. Yet he must transcend these limitations by subsuming them under the fullest possible humanity, both of the individual and of man in society. While affirming the sacredness of the individual, man must break out of the prison of the self and establish a communion of one spirit with another. Thus Melville follows the aesthetic course outlined by Kierkegaard in that he asserts man's powers in the face of their obvious finitude. On the other hand, Melville recognizes that man's desire for order, his spark of divinity, can never be satisfied with mere accommodation to the world of flux. If man is to reach any certainty, he must escape from the world of experience to the extent that he establishes a vital contact with a Permanence transcending himself.

Thus it seems to me that Melville returns to the concept of God as the source of order and stability, and that the basic goal of his religious quest between 1846 and 1851 in particular is to attempt the renewal of man's relationship with God or to demonstrate to himself the impossibility of such a communion. The presence of both these elements in Melville's art -- the assertion of man's immanent power and the affirmation of the need for a transcendence beyond man -- accounts for many of the contradictions and paradoxes which have troubled critics of his work. Yet it is Melville's ultimately irreconcilable duality of vision, not only of religious problems but of life in general, that gives his art its salience. The tensions that nearly tore this man to pieces also drove him to literature, the only form of expression capable of sustaining his "impulsive counterchange."

The Personal Situation

Despite Melville's claim that his life really began in his twenty-fifth year, the fires that were sparked at that time only ignited fuels accumulated before his return from the South Seas. Yet it is at precisely this point in discussing Melville's religious views that one encounters a critical impasse. We have available to us nearly all the significant biographical data about Melville, his family, and his associates that we are ever likely to have. But can one know fully the nature of the persons with whom Melville lived and worked and of the events in which he participated? More importantly, is it possible to determine exactly to what extent any aspect of his early experience contributed to the formation of his character? In such an intimate area of a man's being as his religious life such obstacles are hardest to overcome, but in Melville's case it is also there that the effort to do so is vitally important. Unless we try to understand the many sources of Melville's highly eclectic system of religious attitudes, the complexity of his situation may appear to be merely the result of a disorganized personality.

William Braswell notes that one reason for Melville's persistence in his religious quest lies in the fact that all his life he was surrounded by men and women whose religious faith held a central place in their lives.[1] This pattern, most significantly and most influentially, began with Allan and Maria Melville. Persons to whom God's existence and man's relationship to Him were daily realities, not abstractions, Melville's parents were careful to imbue all their children with the religious faith they felt was needed to pass safely through this world to a better one after death. Their efforts in Herman's case were successful in a way they had not intended. Ironically, while their cherished elder son Gansevoort showed little religious consciousness in the later stages of his short life, his younger brother became an unorthodox but intensely religious man.

Three interrelated forces contributed to the early religious training that Melville's parents provided him: the pervasive influence of the Bible, direct and indirect religious guidance in the home, and orthodox teaching in church. The Bible, first of all, was central to the development of Melville's religious thought. His books are clear evidence not only that Melville, like most Protestant youths of his time, was heavily indoctrinated in the Scriptures but also that they made a lasting impression on his imagination. Since Nathalia Wright has so carefully examined the nature of his Biblical references, I need only discuss here the Bible's religious significance to Melville. Professor Wright feels it necessary to explain Melville's "attitude to this source, so religious in content, appropriated to so literary an end."[2] In reality no complex explanation of Melville's attitude is necessary; for while Professor Wright is correct when she says that the Bible retained for Melville none of the almost magical aura of infallibility that it had for many others of his religion, it is not true that the Scriptures were without religious meaning for him. Indeed the intensity of his reaction to the Holy Land is made intelligible by his feeling that the events which had taken place there represented some of man's noblest efforts to transcend himself and be united with God, a struggle which in Melville's view was the essence of the religious quest. But at some point, before he ever started to write, Melville had come to the decision that, though the Bible contained much truth, it was not a "revelation" in the orthodox sense of the term. In other words, Scripture was not the outline of a way of salvation, of escape from the human condition. Rather it was a profound revelation of the nature of man's situation, a beautiful but somber warning to man of what he is and must be.

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[1] William Braswell, Melville's Religious Thought (Durham, North Carolina, 1943), p. 8.

[2] Nathalia Wright, Melville's Use of the Bible (Durham, North Carolina, 1949), p. 12.

This point of view often set Melville against the broad spectrum of Christian Biblical interpretation. For him, Job was not a pious story with the moral that justice eventually triumphs or that man must bow to the will of an all-provident, all-knowing God. It was instead a terrible fable of Everyman, the plaything of the gods in a world beyond his final comprehension or control. In Melville's view, the Wisdom books were more germane to a true conception of religion than the generally hopeful Psalms, so important in Christian liturgy and symbolism. And in the New Testament, Melville refused to accept Christ either as a smiling, beneficent teacher or as the God-man whose perfection makes our own rottenness more apparent. Rather, Christ was a true "Son of Man," the Man of Sorrows. He epitomized man's suffering, man's loneliness, man's quest for unity with God and with himself. Thus, for Melville the traditional conception of the Sermon on the Mount as a kindly admonition to good deeds and self-control was absurd. The Sermon was instead the plea of a beautiful and compassionate soul that men recognize their own limitations -- and in that recognition unite, one with the other.

It should be obvious, then, that Melville's denial that the Scriptures are a direct revelation from God to man was a denial neither of the validity of the religious point of view nor of the religious significance of the Bible itself. The objection he raised to David Strauss and Barthold Niebuhr was precisely that they stripped the Bible of some of the valid religious truth embodied in its stories and teachings. As Professor Wright observes, Melville read the Bible "with much the same kind of attention he gave to all books. As he disentangled its truth from dogma he perceived it as akin to all other truth in the world."[1] But he also made the same specifically religious demands of Scriptural truth that he made of all forms of faith: first, that it conform to life as it really is; and second, that it offer man not necessarily a guarantee of salvation but at least a hope that he can do something to overcome his own frustrating limitations. This second requirement is important; for without action on man's part religion is degrading, and without such a hope at all it is ridiculous. Christ himself was for so long very important in Melville's religious thought because he seemed the supreme example of a man able to transcend mere humanity and unite himself with the ordering force of God. Christ's wish that "all may be one, even as thou, Father, in me and I in thee" was one that Melville would have approved.

Sectarianism, which Melville later saw as an abomination in religion, was apparently absent for the most part from his early religious life. He was baptized in the Dutch Reformed Church nineteen days after his birth, but the first member of the family to enter the church formally was Maria in 1832, two months after Allan's death. Helen (1837) and Augusta (1838) followed their mother's lead, but none of the boys in the family took such a step. Moreover, other members of his parents' families were of different sects, and Melville must have seen quite quickly that morality and strength of character do not depend on doctrine. Indeed the evidence presented by Eleanor Metcalf, William Gilman, and others indicates quite clearly that Melville's parents themselves, though they probably kept a strict Dutch Reformed Sabbath, had imbibed enough of the religious liberalism of the times to escape from the gloomy depths of a full Calvinistic theology.

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[1] Wright, p. 15.

What attitudes, then, was Melville likely to have absorbed from his parents' religious outlook? Perhaps the chief religious trait that we can observe in their letters is trust in God. The God of Allan and Maria was definitely an immanent God, the Hebrew God of history transferred to the personal life. Both of them believed that He watched over and guided their lives with the loving care of a Father. To both he was a God who sent pain and suffering to test his children, but only for their ultimate good.[1]

Melville must have been deeply impressed by this childlike trust in God, particularly on the part of his father, whom (on the evidence of Redburn and Pierre) he seems to have admired in the manner of most young boys. Allan was a dedicated, though apparently not a shrewd, businessman who saw quite clearly that he, not God, must put food in the mouths of his wife and children. Yet his use of capital letters when referring to the Deity reflects a sincere acknowledgement of the total sovereignty of God. Herman was later to indicate his opinion of such subservience by calling the normal capitalization of the pronoun referring to "God" a "slight dash of flunkeyism."[1] We need not look far for the cause of Melville's somewhat bitter attitude. On the one hand, Allan believed that God imposed calamities upon his children to remind them of his omnipotence. On the other hand, he often made such statements of trust in God's mercy as this one:

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[1] William Gilman, Melville's Early Life and "Redburn" (New York, 1951), pp. 21-23, 25, 27.

> . . . I too well know that for years to come, should my life be spared, I may look forward to the periodical recurrence of doubts, perplexities & apprehensions but with the blessing of heaven, I will yet surmount them all, & perhaps enjoy in the decline of life with my beloved Family, whose welfare is dearer than my own, the reward of honest perseverance, honorable intentions & undoubting Faith.[2]

At some time in his youth, Melville hardly could have avoided placing such an attitude side by side with the manner of his father's death and the resulting hardship to the family. He could have found a similar moral in the case of his first cousin Guert Gansevoort, one in which he later manifested great interest. As Guert set out to sea, he was admonished by Melville's father: " . . . but above all, my little sailor Boy, let me conjure you, *forget not your* Creator in the dawn of youth . . . neglect not the *Bible*, regard it as your *polar star* . . . . "[3] Allan was not to live long enough to see Gue~~s~~rt end his life in semi-disgrace, in part because at the crisis of his life religion had been a no more infallible guide than any other form of limited human truth. Long before he began to write, then, Melville began to accumulate evidence that the religious confidence of his parents provided a somewhat unsubstantial foundation for life on earth; that "the reward of honest perseverance, honorable intentions & undoubting Faith" was to be found, if at all, in heaven. At least by 1851 Melville found this qualified promise of joy after death a meaningless one in terms of the way men must live on earth. By 1856 he found it altogether unbelievable.

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[1] *Letters*, p. 129. It is interesting to see Melville in *Clarel* capitalizing every letter in any word remotely referring to Christ, apparently out of a lifelong admiration rather than a spirit of subservience.

[2] Gilman, p. 23.

[3] Leyda, I, 19.

Scholarship of the last twenty years has made untenable the position that Melville's religious training was exclusively Calvinistic. Nevertheless, Melville himself gives evidence throughout his work that the theology of the Dutch Reformed Church left its mark upon him despite his parents' liberalism. First of all, Melville's orthodox instruction would have reinforced in his mind a concept implied in his parents' religious trust -- the idea that through an omnipotent God man can hope to find ultimate order, that in Providence the apparent aimlessness of human life is resolved into a plan beneficial to man, that in communion with the Deity man's tragic finitude might somehow be overcome. But, as Newton Arvin says, "the time had passed when such a man [as Melville] could accept any truths, however sublime, on the mere strength of revelation and certainly of theological authority."[1] Melville seems never to have forgotten this concept of order learned so early in his religious life. What he lost sometime in his young manhood was his capacity to believe in it; and, like Thoreau with his hound, horse, and dove, Melville sought that faith for the rest of his life.

The specific Calvinistic doctrines which he must have been taught as a youth undergo much the same transformation as that we have observed in his maturing attitude toward the Bible. The religious questions which he found himself examining in his novels were distillations of "truths" simply accepted by most of those around him, the element of faith having been boiled away by the heat of his partially inborn and partially acquired skepticism. The religious agony through which Melville put himself is due in part to the fact that he never escaped from this residuum of his early faith. Always deeply aware of the possible truth of the religious point of view, he inevitably found his very questionings of life (and therefore his tentative answers as well) colored by it. For this reason we should not be surprised to see him approaching such problems as man's freedom and evil in the world from not only a religious but a Calvinist direction.

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[1] Newton Arvin, Herman Melville (New York, 1950), p. 35.

For example, Melville's parents emphasized in their faith God's mercy and provident care of His children. The Dutch Reformed catechism, on the other hand, made whatever mercy God deigned to show seem as purely arbitrary and, in a sense, as frightening as his justice:

> We believe that all the posterity of Adam, being thus fallen into perdition and ruin, by the sins of our first parents, God then did manifest himself such as he is; that is to say, *merciful and just*: *Merciful*, since he delivers and preserves from this perdition all, whom he in his eternal and unchangeable council, in mere goodness hath elected in Christ Jesus our Lord, without any respect to their works: *Just*, in leaving others in the fall and perdition wherein they have involved themselves.[1]

Melville undeniably experienced a revulsion toward this theology. *Mardi* indicates how much he hated the "scare tactics" which made men afraid of God, convinced them of their own worthlessness, and kept them in degrading subservience to church authority. And yet, ironically, Melville seems never to have abandoned the Calvinistic view of God as the stern Father and almighty Ruler. Too aware of the evil and suffering around him to become an optimist on the natural *or* the supernatural level of life, Melville's nearly automatic first assumption (as it is reflected in his books before Moby-Dick) was that God must be directly involved in man's unfortunate situation and that man must accommodate himself to this truth. Indeed, the emphasis which Melville himself placed on Christ's gentleness (though it was later to bother him greatly) seems to have its source in a hope that the God-man could somehow exorcise or palliate the inflexible Father beyond the reach of men's cries.

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[1] *The Constitution of the Reformed Dutch Church of North America* (Philadelphia, 1840), p. 47. [Cited hereafter as *Constitution*.]

Another example of the lasting impression of Calvinist teaching on Melville's attitudes can be found in his view of evil in the world. As Mardi demonstrates, he refused to accept the Calvinistic view of man's utter insignificance and ugliness before God. Further, he rejected the concept of man's inherent and complete evil expressed in this question and answer from the Dutch Reformed catechism:

> Q. 6. Are we then so corrupt that we are wholly incapable of doing any good, and inclined to all wickedness?
>
> A. Indeed we are . . . .[1]

The small but memorable group of demoniacally evil men in Melville's books can be misleading with regard to Melville's attitude toward evil. Though his creation of these characters may have been influenced by the Calvinistic elements of his imagination, "depravity according to nature" is more a philosophical than a religious concept. Objects of pity rather than hatred, the Claggarts are not intended to be extraordinary examples of what all men are in essence.[2] As Professor Braswell says: "Melville admitted that some men are constitutionally unfitted to abide by moral principles, but he maintained that the mass of men can lead better lives if they use their faculties properly. Though they have some bad impulses, they also have good impulses, and they have the freedom to act upon these."[1]

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[1] Constitution, p. 4.

[2] Note that, though he may imply that God is to blame for the existence of suffering or evil in man's heart, Melville seldom employs a voice clearly his own to rail at the Creator. His bitterness is inherent in his compassion. Melville, then, is less interested in deciding whether God is responsible for Jackson or the Liverpool slums than he is in finding a way for man to live in a world which spawns such horrors. It is this attitude which leads Milton Stern to label Melville a "Naturalist."

Despite his disagreement with the Calvinist view, however, Melville never quite escaped from the implications of another statement in the catechism:

> Q. 5. Canst thou keep all these things [the two great commandments] perfectly?
>
> A. In no wise; for I am _prone by nature_ to hate God and my neighbour.[2]

Throughout his life Melville was to find the essence of this doctrine confirmed in the actions of men. In "Hawthorne and His Mosses," he says that "in certain moods, no man can weigh this world, without throwing in something, somehow like Original Sin, to strike the uneven balance."[3] Typically, Melville is not affirming a theological doctrine here but stating a human truth in religious terms. Calvinism had sharpened his awareness of the heart's evil; and he was never to forget, as did so many of his contemporaries, that a powerfully destructive force lay coiled at the bottom of every human soul.

Perhaps the most important aspect of the residuum of Calvinistic dostrine in Melville's mature attitudes takes the form of his concept of "fate." We have seen that the Dutch Reformed catechism taught that men were predestined to salvation or damnation. We have seen that Allan and Maria Melville believed that God directed every event in their lives toward an eventual good end. We have evidence from Melville himself and from his companions that he was vitally interested in questions of predestination, necessity, and free will. But anyone who attempts to find in him a firm adherence to any form of abstract determinism or anti-determinism will be disappointed. Melville feels too deeply the reality of man's power for deliberate action to deny free will completely; yet he is too aware of the accidental and unfathomable nature of much in human existence to grant man total control over his world or even himself. Melville's only consistent concept of Fate is a product of the same process which helped to create his attitude toward evil. He never lost the impression of Calvinism's emphasis on man's lack of control over his life. But, as was usual with him, he switched the religious focus from the power of God to the plight of man. The result is a vision central to Melville's writing -- that of man trying, with tragic consequences, to rise above himself and his limitations. Melville was eventually to resort to Greek religion for the symbols of this struggle -- first to the favorite Romantic figure of the Titan and then, after his major period of work was finished, to an image on a smaller scale but perhaps more impressively tragic: "In a niche of the Vatican stands the Laocoön, the very semblance of a great and powerful man writhing with the inevitable destiny which he cannot throw off."[1]

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[1] Braswell, p. 32.

[2] _Constitution_, p. 4 (italics mine).

[3] "Mosses," pp. 540-541.

Calvinism, therefore, unacceptable to Melville as a religious faith, helped to open his eyes to the grim realities of life, realities with which all religions have to struggle. The world, as Melville discovered, is indeed a dangerous place; for it is usually when one emerges from the home into the larger forms of society that the system of knowledge and belief implanted in the mind and heart is first challenged. It is then that attitudes begin either to become inflexible, to change and grow, or to disintegrate. As is the case with most children, Melville's first significant step outside his home tumbled him into a schoolroom. Professor Gilman has presented in detail what is known of Melville's education, and I need not repeat his information here. But one contrast in Melville's early schooling seems relevant to this study. His first formal education was received at the New York Male High School, where a democratic student government was in force, where physical punishment was rare, and where sectarian religion was absent.[1] The family's move to Albany in 1830 brought about a notable change. At the Albany Academy, where Melville continued his education until his father's death, beatings "were apparently an almost daily affair" and religious instruction was inserted into all the subjects of the curriculum.[2] Here may have begun Melville's intense hatred of arbitrary authority and the degradation of body and soul which it can impose, authority exercised (significantly) in an overtly "Christian" atmosphere.

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[1] Quoted in Merton M. Sealts, Jr., Melville as Lecturer (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1957), p. 139.

One more aspect of Melville's formal education is important in a survey of its influence on his religious attitudes. Two of the schools Melville attended affirmed in their philosophies a vital connection between religion and morality. A trustee of the Albany Academy stated that the School "always aims to qualify youth for the business pursuits of active life. Practical combined with moral education, is the primary law of our Institution . . . ."[3] The goal of the Albany Classical School, which Melville began to attend in 1835, was "to secure the two great ends of education;

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[1] Gilman, p. 29. [2] *Ibid.*, p. 53. [3] *Ibid.*, p. 52.

the cultivation of the intellect and the formation of character under the influence of the Christian religion."[1]

The implication that morality is the primary product of religious teaching and that it can be inculcated along with business skills is an important one. For Melville's training in his home and church as well as in school led him to see morality as the immediate result of the practice of religion. The source of this attitude can be found, in part, in the development of Protestant thought already outlined. The member of the Roman Catholic Church is asked to submit his individual will, to an extent, to the guidelines of the Church, a ready-made community of conventional beliefs and moral precepts. The Protestant, however, is supposedly left free to exercise his right to determine his religious practice as he sees fit. But just as some Catholics equated the formal structure with a total commitment to the Christian life, so it is inevitable that some Protestants tried to throw off some of the burden of individuality by forming a socio-religious structure in the community against which their actions could be measured. Thus social conventions merged into religious norms so that the two systems and their sanctions were very nearly identical. It was, in a sense, a return to Puritan theocracy with God very nearly excluded. Therefore, despite the denial of good works as instruments in salvation, Protestant communities tended to consider correct social behavior the sign of a good Christian.

As usual, Melville the man was unable to accept in full the attitudes absorbed by Melville the boy. Since he was deeply interested in the effect of a religious belief upon the individual himself, it is only natural that he would stress that aspect of the religious life -- moral action --

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[1] Gilman, p. 71.

that would involve a man most fully in the improvement or ruination of his own life and the lives of those around him. Like his contemporaries, Melville judged a man's Christian commitment by his moral practice. But for Melville, morality transcended overt conformity to community standards. It was rather the individual's active acceptance of Christ's commandment of love; it was understanding of, compassion for, and unity with one's neighbor. Man's moral responsibility to himself and his interaction with society, then, became for Melville the proving ground for any religious teaching. It was from this sphere, rather than in individual meditation, for example, that man had to reach toward whatever order might exist in the universe. It was here or nowhere that a religious system must be fruitful; for, if religion could not subdue the chaos within man, it could not proceed to its ultimate purpose of uniting him to God. Because of its importance in his religious point of view, therefore, society was a powerful catalyst in the growth of Melville's mature attitudes. Many of his reactions to the religious problems of man in society will be treated in the discussion of the works themselves. But unless he led a very sheltered early life, the seeds of Melville's later interest in two major socio-religious questions must have been planted long before he went to sea: the hypocrisy rampant in a society calling itself Christian and the problem of an individual's moral responsibility to himself when his conscience dissents from the dictates of society.

Melville's habit of generalizing from a particular evildoer to the group to which he belongs, as in his criticism of the missionaries, weakens many of his moral questionings of Christianity and its adherents. One of the reasons that such a capacious mind as Melville's was never able to overcome this basic intellectual fault is that his earliest religious environment encouraged it. If he always tended to judge the worth of a religion by identifying it with the culture in which it was openly espoused, it was because the society which he knew all his life insisted upon calling itself "Christian." To a great extent, those who were socially acceptable were considered Christians," while those who, by crime, vice, or unconventional opinions, were exempted from social approval were assumed to be outside the pale of religion. Inevitably Melville had to discover, as all men do, that a Christian society harbors a large number of persons who, though they call themselves Christians, habitually and hypocritically oppose the essence of Christianity.

> No young man could have read the Albany Microscope without acquiring a realistic concept of ordinary human behavior, nor could he have missed a substantial education in all that is vicious, criminal, and depraved. Herman lived in an upright section of town, next door to a church, and he moved in the most proper circles, but he knew that within a few minutes' walk of Gansevoort's store were streets where every kind of vice was practiced, and he knew that even some of Albany's respectable citizens, members, perhaps, of the state legislature, indulged in them.[1]

The realization that, even in Albany, not all Christendom was Christian was probably not a devastating trauma for the young Melville. But as Rolfe says of Mortmain:

> . . . most men somehow get used
> To seeing evil though not all
> They see; 'tis sympathetical;
> But never some are disabused
> Of first impressions which appal.
>
> (Clarel, II, xxxvii, 55-61.)

Melville himself was to dwell upon and subtilize his vision of what often lay behind the facade of pious religion. Mortmain's account of the sins of Sodom and Gomorrah mirrors Melville's recognition that the physical vices of which Professor Gilman speaks are not the worst possible human failings. Mortmain

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[1] Gilman, pp. 96-97.

> Urged that those malefactors stood
> Guilty of sins scarce scored as crimes
> In any statute known, or code --
> Nor now, nor in the former times:
> Things hard to prove: decorum's wile,
> Malice discreet, judicious guile;
> Good done with ill intent -- reversed:
> Best deeds designed to serve the worst;
> And hate which under life's fair hue
> Prowls like the shark in sunned Pacific blue.
>
> (Clarel, II, xxxvi, 30-39.)

Perhaps Melville's introduction to the world of relative poverty helped to refine his idea of the heartlessness of which a professedly Christian society was capable. In any case, he was to ponder throughout life the paradox expressed with his odd sort of convivial bitterness by Ishmael. He notes, for the benefit of his Lima friends, that among the churches of the Mohawk valley flows the Erie Canal,

> one continual stream of Venetianly corrupt and often lawless life. There's your true Ashantee, gentlemen; there howl your pagans; where you ever find them, next door to you; under the long-flung shadow, and the snug patronizing lee of the churches. For by some curious fatality, as it is often noted of your metropolitan freebooters that they ever encamp around the halls of justice, so sinners, gentlemen, most abound in holiest vicinities.[1]

As the awareness of the evil at the heart of his Christian society became more intense, Melville was brought face to face with a second problem. His growing hatred of moral hypocrisy pushed him from the center of conventional moral standards, and from this new point of view he gained an insight into a dual dilemma. First of all, if a man abandons conventional morality as it is practiced, if only to espouse it as it is taught in theory, will he not be considered antisocial, in fact branded a sinner? Is it not possible that the time may come when the moral judgments, or even the interests, of society may directly oppose his own conception of morality? Melville was eventually forced to consider how one can remain a member of a structured ethical community and still maintain his essential moral integrity. At this point the second aspect of the question presented itself. Once he has discarded conventional sanctions, who or what is to guarantee the validity of his moral decisions? At some point in his early life Melville began to ask himself whether, in this irrational world, religious teaching could provide such a guide. The question may have been crystallized for him when he returned from the South Seas to learn of the Somers mutiny. Guert Gansevoort's assertion that his controversial part in the court martial was "approved of God"[1] would have seemed to Melville a tragically insufficient justification in the face of the moral ambiguity of Gansevoort's situation. Melville, at least from this time onward, was to struggle with this very dilemma -- that man is in no position to judge moral problems with total accuracy and fairness, but that he *cannot* be certain that his decisions are approved on the basis of any transcendent ethical system.

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[1] Herman Melville, Moby-Dick, edited by Harrison Hayford and Herschel Parker (New York, 1967), p. 214.

Melville may or may not have carefully considered many of the religious questions I have outlined before his 1839 voyage to Liverpool and his extended journey to the South Seas, but their seeds had been planted deep in his soul. His experiences between 1839 and 1844 were the sun and water needed to make them flower into profound intellectual disturbances. There is no doubt that Melville would have been a different man had he not gone to sea, just as he would have been different had his father's early death not plunged the family into a continuing financial crisis. It is difficult to determine, however, precisely what his voyages contributed to his religious sensibility. Since he left no account contemporary with the voyages, the only record of his reactions is to be found in his novels; and it can be properly considered only in the context of the books themselves. Perhaps the simplest statement about Melville's adventures is even so the best -- that they enlarged his field of vision and deepened the intensity of his reaction to life. The enforced acquaintance with hardened, embittered men on board ship was a totally new experience. The comparison of his own poverty with that in the Liverpool slums was inevitable and undoubtedly disturbing. He may have come into enough contact with the rigid class system in England to feel its oppressiveness. The contrasts of "savage" and civilized life, the differences of religion and morality that greeted him in the South Seas were obviously important to his intellectual and emotional growth. By 1844 Melville had a concept of the world which was to influence him throughout his career. As Professor Gilman says: "He never fully denied the credo in which he was raised, but he was now in a position to assess its direct bearing on every aspect of life. A perfect integrity impelled him to do so, and he soon discovered the necessary powers to articulate his judgments."[1]

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[1] Leyda, I, 161.

But the fruit of Melville's travels was not limited to an expansion of his knowledge of men and their world. The only way to explain the bulk and quality of his literary output in the fourteen years after his return from Hawaii is to assume that a synthesis had taken place between 1839 and 1844 -- a synthesis not so much of thought as of experience. Perhaps the best way to characterize this development would be to expand James Baird's use of what he calls the "autotype." He defines the autotype as "the rigid facsimile of experience fragmented, ordering symbolic uniformity where only disparity among sensa had existed."[1] He restricts Melville's autotype to his Polynesian experiences; but could it not be said that all of Melville's adventures provided him with the central core of reality around which he would later weave the nuances of his imaginative creation and intellectual probings? Melville's voyages, as he conceived them a few years after their conclusion, provided him with an experiential unity sufficient to balance his religious and philosophical turmoil and to carry him through not only books based on actuality but the more purely imaginative _Mardi_, _Moby-Dick_, and _Pierre_. His experiences, like the ships in the novels, became microcosms through which he could utter his fullest insights into his world. They also set him apart from the men who were to be his peers in the literature of the age. Baird makes this point very clearly in a comparison of Melville's symbolism with that of Emerson and Thoreau:

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[1] Gilman, pp. 160-161.

> But I think it is better to regard the genesis of his symbolic form as doubly conditioned: he is related to the American tradition of Emerson and Thoreau in the freedom of linguistic form which he displays; he depends upon his own unique experience, all of it profoundly emotional, all of it very unlike any experience which Concord provided, all of it _felt_ in areas comprehensible to Emerson and Thoreau, yet considerably removed from what they saw and touched.[2]

And so a man already equipped by nature to see beyond the limits of contemporary society was moved by his wide range of experience further from the conventional center of his culture than the most intellectual and talented of his countrymen. Through the rupture created by that shift, Melville attained a vision of his nation and world unique for his time.

But what of the America to which Melville returned in 1844, an

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[1] Baird, p. 83. [2] _Ibid._, p. xviii.

America which to him was not so much alien as placed in a new and illuminating perspective by his strange adventures? What influence upon his thought and literature was wrought by this expanding, boastful nation only seventy years after its act of independence from England? Melville, who remained intensely aware that he was an *American* writer, seems to have felt that being such gave him an advantage over even his beloved Shakespeare. He wrote to Evert Duyckinck:

> -- I would to God Shakespeare had lived later, & promenaded in Broadway. Not that I might have had the pleasure of leaving my card for him at the Astor, or made merry with him over a bowl of fine Duyckinck punch; but that the muzzle which all men wore on their souls in the Elizabethan day, might not have intercepted Shakespers full articulations. For I hold it a verity, that even Shakspeare was not a frank man to the uttermost. And, indeed, who in this intolerant Universe is, or can be? *But the Declaration of Independence makes a difference*.[1]

Melville was later to speculate to Hawthorne that Solomon, whose wisdom Melville found even more profound than Shakespeare's, "a little *managed* the truth with a view to popular conservatism."[2]

Melville's affirmation of the freedom of the American artist is not, as it might appear, founded upon the assurance of a receptive public. His assessment of the position of the American author in society is to be found in a letter to his English publisher written six months before the publication of *Moby-Dick*. Melville states that the movement for international copywright must be begun by the English:

> Who have any motive in this country to bestir themselves in this thing? Only the authors. -- Who are the authors? A handful. And what influence have they to bring to bear upon any question whose settlement must necessarily assume a political form? -- They can bring scarcely any influence whatever. This country and nearly all its affairs are governed by sturdy backwoodsmen -- noble fellows enough, but not at all literary, & who care not a fig for any

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[1] *Letters*, pp. 79-80 (italics mine). [2] *Ibid*., p. 130.

> authors except those who write those most saleable of all books nowadays -- i.e. -- the newspapers, & magazines.[1]

The situation of writer as writer was not much better than that of the writer as public force. Literary taste still tended to be Anglophile when it was not merely sentimental. The public was unwilling to accept any serious criticism of its conventions and ideals, religious or political. In an anonymous review in 1849 of Cooper's The Sea Lions, Melville mentions "those who more for fashion's sake than anything else, have of late joined in decrying our National Novelist."[2] If his readers would turn against a writer as popular as Cooper, it is not surprising that they would refuse to consider or even understand Melville's more elemental probings into their cherished conceptions of life.

The source of the belief expressed in Melville's comment on Shakespeare, then, must be sought, not in the receptiveness of the American people to "Truth-telling," but in a combination of two aspects of the American situation -- its isolation and its democratic spirit. Marius Bewley speaks with some justification of the American author's "sense of being without certain kinds of reality that men ought to have: the sense that there is a world of abstract ideas and ideals, and a world of bitter fact, but no society or tradition or orthodoxy in which the two worlds can interact and quality each other."[3] But Bewley is ignoring the dynamics of the American literary situation in saying that when American authors "were writing most intensely they were intent on discovering and defining a reality that the traditions and orthodoxy of the Old World had presented pre-packaged to the European novelists."[1] Americans were not so cut off from Europe that they had no access to its "traditions and orthodoxy." American culture was indeed different from the European, and it gave American writers a perspective on the Old World which Europeans could seldom attain. Bewley complains that "America inherited no great theological system with which to order experience,"[2] but ~~it would~~ be difficult to find any "great theological system" flourishing in the Europe of Melville's time (at least none that could not be found in America also). The fact was, as Melville began to see when he returned from his travels, that his country's isolation, while it made the people somewhat insular, was not totally disadvantageous for a writer. America's physical and cultural separation from Europe put a man like Melville in an avant-garde position, a position which forced him to search for a _new_ reality, a _new_ tradition. Europe's conventions would have answered Melville's questions no more than America's did.

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[1] Letters, p. 134. [2] Leyda, I, 301.

[3] Marius Bewley, The Eccentric Design (New York, 1959), p. 17.

Also on the subject of the American literary situation, Leslie Fiedler contends that "finding a language, learning to talk in a land where there are no conventions of conversation, no special class idioms and no dialogue between classes, no continuing literary language -- this exhausts the American writer."[3] If this portrait of the American's difficulties is at all an accurate one, we can point to the linguistic achievements of Emerson, Thoreau, and Melville himself as extraordinary efforts to create a new literary idiom. In the same way, the isolation of the American from Europe created both new insight and technical problems. The effort to overcome the latter would be made once the impetus was given to express the former. Melville found this impetus in the spirit of democracy itself. Like his father -- a man who applauded the French Revolution of 1830 and found slavery repugnant but considered the People "scurvy and ungrateful Masters"[1] -- Melville revered the priceless good to be found in the individual human spirit and yet had no illusions about the unlimited ability of man in the mass to govern himself. Melville's objections in Mardi to overconfidence in democratic institutions are well known, and yet the democratic idea was of paramount importance in his conception of his fellow man. We should not be surprised to find him uniting democracy and religion in such a concept as "that unshackled democratic spirit of Christianity."[2] In the first place, the fusion of the two ideas was a commonplace in American culture. Roy F. Nichols in his book Religion and American Democracy notes that religion and democracy were used to reinforce each other, particularly in the educational system of the nation.[3] Secondly, and more importantly for Melville, both democracy and basic Christianity asserted the importance and potential greatness of the individual, any individual. Melville found in American democracy, in its best moments, a confirmation of this belief. At its worst, America fit into a different religious pattern, as Melville noted in "On a Housetop," a poem about the New York draft riots during the Civil War:

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[1] Bewley, p. 16. [2] _Ibid._, p. 190.

[3] Leslie Fiedler, _Love and Death in the American Novel_ (New York, 1960), p. xix.

> Wise Draco comes, deep in the midnight roll
> Of black artillery; he comes, though late;
> In code corroborating Calvin's creed
> And cynic tyrannies of honest kinds;
> He comes, nor parleys; and the Town, redeemed,

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[1] Gilman, p. 15. [2] "Mosses," p. 49.

[3] Baton Rouge, 1959, pp. 64-65.

Gives thanks devout; nor, being thankful, heeds
The grimy slur on the Republic's faith implied,
Which holds that Man is naturally good,
And -- more -- is Nature's Roman, never to be scourged.[1]

The "unshackled democratic spirit of Christianity" -- for much of his life this was to be Melville's main hope for the salvation of man; and it is in the context of this hope that we must see America's primary influence on him. To an extent which can never be known for sure but must have been large, living and writing in a country whose expressed ideals embodied an affirmation of the essential worth of a human being gave Melville the final impulse to say what he felt in his heart. It was an atmosphere of freedom and dignity, triumphing even over such a horror as slavery, which led Melville to attempt at all costs to find a way for man to improve his life, increase his dignity, and exercise his freedom in a meaningful human setting. Thus it was fitting that Melville should complete the circle and return to America in 1844 to launch, with _Typee_, an amazing twelve-year period of creativity. Americans would reject much of what he said and would, after 1857, generally ignore him. But Melville remained deeply united with his nation and its people. He tells his story very briefly through Rolfe: "'Tis the New World that mannered me, / Yes, gave me this vile liberty / To reverence naught, not even herself."[2]

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[1] _Poems_, p. 24.

[2] _Clarel_, II, xxvi, 155-157.

Chapter II

TYPEE AND _OMOO_: THE IMPERFECT EDEN

" . . . Grave, canting, Mammonite freebooters,
Who in the name of Christ and Trade
(Oh, bucklered forehead of the brass!)
Deflower the world's last sylvan glade!"

(_Clarel_, IV, ix, 123-126.)

Typee

In 1846 Melville introduced into the already heavy stream of contemporary "literary travelogues" an account of his brief sojourn with a tribe of cannibals in the Marquesas Islands. _Typee_, as Melville's brief preface indicates, displays certain characteristics of other descriptions of exploratory, commercial, and evangelistic voyages published during the first half of the nineteenth century. Melville made the usual claim to be telling the unvarnished truth (and _Typee_ was published in England only with that assurance on Melville's part). More importantly, _Typee_ exhibits the same tripartite nature as other travel books: it embodies "stirring adventure" in surroundings alien to its readers, descriptions of exotic places and peoples, and commentary or reflection on what the author has witnessed.

But, leaving aside Melville's superior ability, even at the beginning of his career, _Typee_ is no ordinary travel book. The "narrative" (as the

British title calls it) is fictionalized far beyond the mere exaggerations indulged in by most travel authors of the time. Written as a direct narrative rather than in diary form, Typee employs a time-sequence quite different from that of Melville's actual experiences. He deliberately abandoned strict autobiography for a purely literary structuring of events and details actually witnessed, borrowed from other books, or invented. Moreover, as Melville himself says in his preface, when he enters into a description of the customs of the islanders he "refrains in most cases from entering into explanations concerning their origin and purposes."[1] He attributes this omission to his lack of scholarly knowledge of Marquesan life, but in fact he could have borrowed "explanations" from sources which supplied him with many details of native mores otherwise unknown to him. The actual reason for his lack of interest in antiquarian researches was that he viewed the natives as human beings, leading lives meaningful in their own terms, rather than as savage curiosities. Consequently, Melville differed from most (though not all) other travel writers of his time in treating native customs and beliefs as worthwhile in themselves, not as riddles to be solved by the scientist or the missionary. He opposed the missionaries' attempts to impose an alien culture and religion upon the South Sea islanders because he recognized, as few of the missionaries did, that the value systems inherent in "primitive" cultures were as valid in their context as "civilized" ideals were elsewhere.

Perhaps it was this recognition that impelled Melville not only to write Typee but to step beyond mere journalism to the broader field of fiction. From the beginning of his career, Melville found the world too full of meaning for him to limit himself to a mere cataloguing of its contents, however interesting they might be; and he apparently felt that the curious amalgam of travel-book and novel offered him the scope to portray both the Typees themselves and his own complex reaction to their way of life. Later in his career Melville would forge the discursiveness of the travel-book into a highly individual novelistic style. But for the moment, the critical question relevant to this study is how well he was able in Typee to integrate an eclectic narrative form with his commentary on the contrast between civilized and primitive life, on native religion, and on the invasions of the South Seas by Western religion and culture.

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[1] Herman Melville, Typee, A Peep at Polynesian Life ("The Writings of Herman Melville"; Evanston, 1968, vol. I), p. xiii.

Though on first reading its plot may seem to be composed merely of episode and digression, Typee is carefully structured around an integrated, sequential group of questions concerning the narrator's situation. Instead of passing from one adventure to another, Tommo finds himself involved in a situation whose facets are revealed to him at different times and in different degrees of completeness, producing in him a series of fluctuating emotional responses. The plot and the themes which it embodies, then, are tied to the continuity of Tommo's reactions to unfolding events. Out of his narrator's emotional vacillations -- ranging from deep serenity to mortal fear -- Melville attempted to draw his own ambiguous but deeply felt response to his experiences as he saw them in 1846.

Melville opens Typee with a motif which also occurs at the beginning of his next two works -- landlessness. Not until Moby-Dick does the "open independence of the sea" become a positive virtue in Melville's work -- and even there it is an ambivalent ideal. In Typee the limitless potentiality of the sea is an imprisoning rather than a liberating force, and the narrator longs for escape: "Oh! for a refreshing glimpse of one blade of grass --

for a snuff at the fragrance of a handful of the loamy earth! Is there nothing fresh around us? Is there no green thing to be seen?"[1] With the announcement that the _Dolly_ will land at the Marquesas, Tommo's attitudes shift somewhat. The land now acquires a value of its own, a lure distinct from its being a release from perpetual sailing:

> The Marquesas! What strange visions of outlandish things does the very name spirit us! Naked houris -- cannibal banquets -- groves of cocoa-nut -- coral reefs -- tatooed chiefs -- and bamboo temples; sunny valleys planted with bread-fruit-trees -- carved canoes dancing on the flashing blue waters -- savage woodlands guarded by horrible idols -- _heathenish_ _rites_ _and_ _human_ _sacrifices_.[2]

This catalogue of exotica -- though it omits much that will later interest the narrator about the islands -- foreshadows in its mixture of attraction and repulsion the ambivalence with which he will react to the alien culture of the Typees.

But the _Dolly_ has not yet reached land, and Melville uses the opportunity of her approach to Nukuheva to give a history of the Marquesas and an account of their present condition. He also chooses this time to launch his attack against the exploiters and missionaries who have invaded the Pacific islands. Unfortunately this early section of criticism is too obviously a projection of Melville's own voice to be artistically effective. For example the mildly baudy stories about the discomfiture of a missionary's wife and of a group of French officers by the natives are early and unmistakable indications that the narrator is glad that the missionaries have failed to convert the Marquesans and that he hopes that the French effort at colonization will also be unsuccessful. Since _Typee_ is a story supposedly being told three years after the events described have taken place, it is not logically impossible for Tommo to have arrived at the opinions he expresses here. It is also likely that many men would have reacted with the narrator's anger and dismay to the motives and methods of the French in capturing the islands. But as his attack on the French continues, we begin to feel that there is no dramatic context in which to place Tommo's opinions. They are too much colored by the virtues of the islanders, known to him but not to us, to be immediately acceptable.

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[1] _Typee_, p. 3. [2] _Ibid_., p. 5.

It seems that Melville, incensed by the actions of the Europeans in the South Seas, found in the French an irresistible target for an invidious comparison that he makes throughout Typee and Omoo:

> And yet, notwithstanding their iniquitous conduct in this and in other matters, the French have ever plumed themselves upon being the most humane and polished of nations. A high degree of refinement, however, does not seem to subdue our wicked propensities so much after all; and were civilization itself to be estimated by some of its results, it would seem perhaps better for what we call the barbarous part of the world to remain unchanged.[1]

The reader, however, must be allowed to see the joys of primitive life in the Typee valley before he can feel for himself the truth of the statement that the native night better be left untouched by Western culture. Melville's irrelevant digression to describe the French seizure of Tahiti is a further indication that, for a time, he became more interested in an attack on the French than in a dramatic portrayal of his main character and his experiences. In fact it is only in his account of the Dolly's landing that Melville shows the effect of the Western invasion upon natives with whom Typee is in any sense concerned:

> Our ship was now wholly given up to every species of riot and debauchery. Not the feeblest barrier was interposed between the unholy passions of the crew and their unlimited gratification . . . .

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[1] Typee, p. 17.

> Alas for the poor savages when exposed to the influence of these polluting examples! Unsophisticated and confiding, they are easily led into every vice, and humanity weeps over the ruin thus remorselessly inflicted upon them by their European civilizers.[1]

What is important in this passage is not so much Melville's compassion for the natives as his implicit recognition of divergent moral codes. The natives are not morally guilty for the scene upon the *Dolly* because their customs do not forbid many of the actions in which the sailors involve them. Nevertheless, their simple natures are polluted by the gross nature of "civilized" pleasure-seeking, just as their bodies are wasted by alien Western diseases. The debauched Westerners destroy for them the primitive purity of what were natural acts. This is what Melville means when he says that explorers and traders found only "barbarians" but left behind them the "savages" whom the missionaries abhor.

Once Tommo has decided to quit the sea, at least for a time, he feels it necessary first to justify his actions and secondly to choose a companion. The reason he gives is the same as that given by the narrators in *Omoo* and *Mardi* -- the right and the need of a man to escape from the imprisonment of a whaling voyage. Even if Melville's own desertion had been principally an act of youthful exuberance, he was able to see it in a different light in 1846. A man nearly bartered away his soul by signing for a whaling trip, the length of which Tommo makes seem almost infinite in his humorous sketch of a ghostly whaler. Moreover, the spirit, as well as the body, is fettered by the absolute domination of the whaling captain, an often cruel "Lord of the Plank." But man, as Melville had come to see, battles constantly against limitations of body and soul inherent in his nature and must free himself from all arbitrary restraints laid upon him by others. Thus Tommo makes it clear that his intention in leaving the ship is to liberate himself from bondage, not to take up residence among the natives. Indeed he is gambling that he can avoid being eaten by the island's "irreclaimable cannibals"[1] by hiding in the mountains until the Dolly departs.

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[1] *Typee*, p. 15.

But Tommo is fated, as all of Melville's main characters are fated, to encounter not mere adventure but the essence of the world itself. Tommo freely chooses to escape from the Dolly, but for him the flight is less a liberation from something than a positive act of encounter with life. The island, its mixture of beauties and horrors mirroring the world beyond its own confines, becomes for a time the microcosm in which Tommo will either grow or shrink in human stature. Within the context of the book, his sojourn with the natives is inevitable. It is precisely through the successive grapplings with reality of his main characters that Melville's spiritual and intellectual progress is effected. Thus each of his "heroes" is endowed with traits and placed in circumstances (usually connected with Melville's own life and character) which make him peculiarly receptive to the meaning inherent in his experiences. For example, Tommo is placed in the rare situation of being able to compare first-hand two entirely different societies; and he, like Melville, is able objectively to view divergent moral codes and the sincerity of their adherents. Characteristically, Tommo admits that the Happars and Typees are man-eaters and that they engage in constant warfare; yet, recognizing these acts as evil, he is compelled to compare the natives favorably with those who profess to follow a better way of life.

> On arriving at their destination, [the Westerners] burn, slaughter,

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[1] Typee, p. 24.

> and destroy, according to the tenor of written instructions, and sailing away from the scene of devastation, call upon all Christendom to applaud their courage and their justice.[1]

Every one of Melville's main characters before The Confidence-Man, like Melville himself, seems driven to unite himself to another human being in the bonds of friendship and human understanding. All of them, even Ahab at times, are "Disturbed and troubled in estate, / Longing for solacement of mate."[2] Like most of his successors in Melville's works, Tommo gravitates toward a man above the average, a man possessing special powers of mind and soul: "Toby, like myself, had evidently moved in a different sphere of life, and his conversation at times betrayed this, although he was anxious to conceal it."[3] Toby is also the first (though a minor) example in Melville's works of a person with a natural ability to control the mass of men: "It is strange the power that a mind of deep passion has over feebler natures. I have seen a brawny fellow, with no lack of ordinary courage, fairly quail before this slender stripling, when in one of his furious fits."[4] The friendship of Tommo and Toby, moreover, sets the pattern for most of the other such relationships in Melville's novels. His protagonists are more or less sensitive isolatoes; and they tend to choose as friends men who, like themselves, are for some reason aliens in the world. In The Confidence-Man and after Melville finally abandoned the hope for full friendship between men precisely because he realized that the isolation of the exceptional individual is impossible to overcome:

> If average mortals social be,
> And yet but seldom truly meet,
> Closing like halves of apples sweet --

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[1] Typee, p. 27. [2] Clarel, I, ii, 11-12. [3] Typee, p. 32.

[4] Ibid.

How with the rarer in degree?

(Clarel, I, xxxi, 54-57.)

But perhaps Melville had begun to perceive this truth as early as Typee. Ultimately, Toby can neither support Tommo through his most trying experiences nor rescue him from impending danger.

Tommo's decision to desert his ship having been made and his companion chosen, Melville devotes Chapters VI to X to the successful completion of the escape plan. Almost immediately, however, a problem develops. The mountains in which Tommo and Toby had hoped to hide are barren of fruit; and the two must descend into one of the interior valleys, hopefully that of the friendly Happars. The major question for the adventurers, therefore, turns from "Will the escape be successful?" to "Typee or Happar?". The latter question is answered in Chapter X when the friends encounter two native children and are led by them into the Typee village. From this point onward the structure of Typee is woven around several aspects of the situation in which Tommo, particularly, finds himself. Once he learns that he has fallen into the hands of the infamous Typees, his instinctive fear of primitive peoples becomes fully aroused; and the question of whether he will be killed or allowed to live dominates the rest of the book. However, fate is apparently at work here as well. For if Tommo had encountered the Happars instead of the Typees, his fears presumably would have been stilled; but at the same time, growth through a full appreciation of all aspects of primitive life would have been impossible. The attempt to find the Happar valley was in fact a search for virtue without an intermixture of vice, for security without any threat. It was a quest which Melville knew to be doomed from the start.

Another question in Tommo's mind is whether the Typees are actually cannibals. In Chapter XII Toby's assertion that the two have been fed human flesh is proved false, and fears of the Typees' cannibalistic propensities are quieted for a time. They recur at intervals until Chapter XXXII when, to Tommo's horror, they are confirmed beyond further doubt. Still another structural tension consists in the possibility of escape from the valley. The frightened sailors try to slip away from the Typees one night soon after their capture, but the cannibals quietly restrain them. Toby finally manages to leave the valley with the Typees' permission, and he promises Tommo to bring help as soon as possible. His failure to return, however, leaves a lonely and melancholy Tommo with one hope -- to try to assimilate himself to Typee society until his chance for escape arrives.

It is during Tommo's attempt to learn about the Typees that Melville voices, through his narrator, the comments about society and religion most relevant to this study. Melville himself obviously underwent a similar process of education in the Typee valley as well as throughout his Polynesian experiences, and in Typee the resulting re-vision of his world begins to unfold itself. It was almost inevitable that Melville would contrast the primitive society of the South Sea islanders with the Western Christian civilization from which, in a sense, he had fled on the Acushnet. It was also predictable that as Melville's spokesman makes this contrast during his investigation of Typee life he is forced to the conclusion that Western culture is not, as is widely assumed, necessarily superior to that of a tribe of cannibals. What Tommo discovers is that the obvious physical and mental refinements of civilization are not altogether advantageous:

> In a primitive state of society, the enjoyments of life, though few and simple, are spread over a great extent, and are unalloyed; but Civilization, for every advantage she imparts, holds a hundred evils in reserve; -- the heart burnings, the jealousies, the social rivalries, the family dissensions, and the thousand self-inflicted

> discomforts of refined life, which make up in units the swelling aggregate of human misery, are unknown among these unsophisticated people.[1]

Tommo demonstrates the reversal of a natural priority of values in civilization by juxtaposing two rather different activities. The Typee's method of lighting a fire is ludicrous in its complexity, but his society creates no barrier to the education and comfortable maintenance of his children; on the other hand, a lower-class European, who can light a match in a second, is often unable to feed, much less educate his offspring.[2] The absence of the Western legalistic consciousness, moreover, seems to produce harmony rather than chaos in Typee society. First of all, it eliminates much of the perverse subtlety that men bring to their transgressions of the law:

> I once heard it given as an instance of the frightful depravity of a certain tribe in the Pacific, that they had no word in their language to express the idea of virtue. The assertion was unfounded; but were it otherwise, it might be met by stating that their language is almost entirely destitute of terms to express the delightful ideas conveyed by our endless catalogue of civilized crimes.[3]

Secondly, the simplicity of primitive mores helps to lessen what was for Melville the chief affront to any moral standard -- hypocrisy. If the Typee code of action is barbarous, at least the barbarians, as opposed to many Christians, are faithful to their established ideals.

One aspect of Typee culture in which Melville was naturally interested was native religion, and his commentary on this subject is more subtle than that on primitive and civilized societies. Milton Stern, who holds a position that obviously I cannot adopt -- namely, that religion "becomes Melville's emblem of unquestioned values [and] unexamined behavior"[4]

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[1] Typee, pp. 124-125. [2] Ibid., p. 112. [3] Ibid., p. 126.

[4] Milton R. Stern, The Fine-Hammered Steel of Herman Melville (Urbana, 1957), p. 64.

nevertheless makes an interesting point in discussing Melville's treatment of native religion: "Looked upon as timeless and permanent by its adherents, each religion, like each segment of the world, becomes an isolated caricature of each other religion and each other segment."[1] It seems to me, in fact, that anyone who looks closely at Melville's description of Typee religious practices cannot fail to see there a foreshadowing of the satiric, allegorical method of _Mardi_. The basic tone of the treatment in _Typee_ is comic -- the comedy being directed not against religion itself but against specific beliefs and attitudes toward religious practice.

The allegorical intent emerges in the similarity sometimes evident between the religion in the Typee valley and that in Christendom. For example, Melville takes a rather light view of the native cosmogony concerning some ancient ruins in the valley:

> These structures bear every indication of a very high antiquity, and Kory-Kory, who was my authority in all matters of scientific research, gave me to understand that they were coeval with the creation of the world; that the great gods themselves were the builders; and that they would endure until time shall be no more. Kory-Kory's prompt explanation, and his attributing the work to a divine origin, at once convinced me that neither he nor the rest of his countrymen knew anything about them.
>
> As I gazed upon this monument, doubtless the work of an extinct and forgotten race, thus buried in the green nook of an island at the ends of the earth, the existence of which was yesterday unknown, a stronger feeling of awe came over me than if I had stood musing at the mighty base of the Pyramid of Cheops.[2]

The second paragraph of this passage is worthy of note because the "awe" expressed there is a truly religious emotion for Melville. The Pyramids, as he describes them in his 1856 _Journal_, represented for him the essence of the insoluble questions of the universe with which religion must struggle. They were symbols of the "ungraspable phantom of life," the infinity that man hopes to reach through religion. Thus Melville ridicules not the emotional basis of Kory-Kory's belief but his complacent attitude toward it. The easiest answer to any difficult question is to refer the problem's existence to the Deity. Similarly, Melville's ridicule of the belief in the "imaginary pollution" caused by a woman's presence in the Ti or a canoe[1] may seem to be a typical expression of Western contempt for "savage superstition." Melville's disrespect for this aspect of the system of "taboo," however, may well have had its source in his hatred for hypocrisy, because Fayaway is given a dispensation to ride in a canoe with Tommo: "How it was that the priesthood of Typee satisfied the affair with their consciences, I know not . . . . "[2] Since he condemns Western versions of such time-serving only a few years later in Mardi, it is likely that he had in mind here that such priestly foibles are not limited to Polynesia.

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[1] Stern, p. 61.

[2] _Typee_, pp. 154-155.

The Typee priests themselves, in company with nearly all the Christian priests in Melville's works, have lost their power to lead or influence their people. At the Feast of the Calabashes, religious in nature, the constant praying and preaching of the clergy is heartily ignored by the revelers. Even the gods are not beyond the reach of Typee fickleness. Like the Christian Deity, the Typee gods are often invoked only when some favor is desired and are severely berated when the wishes of their "supplicants" are not granted. On the basis of the evidence that Melville presents, then, we should not be surprised at his assessment of the Typee religious situation:

> In truth, I regard the Typees as a back-slidden generation. They are sunk in religious sloth, and require a spiritual revival. A long prosperity of bread-fruit and cocoa-nuts has rendered them remiss in the performance of their higher obligations. The wood-rot malady is spreading among the idols -- the fruit upon their

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[1] Typee, p. 92.

[2] Ibid., p. 133.

> altars is becoming offensive -- the temples themselves need re-thatching -- the tatooed clergy are altogether too light-hearted and lazy -- and their flocks are going astray.[1]

Again, much of this passage sounds suspiciously like the criticisms Melville will launch against Christendom in the coming years. But there is another, less comic implication in his view of native religion. He cares not at all that the Typees are "back-slidden." Professor Baird comments on this fact: "The Marquesan religion was, indeed, in a state of decay. But it was precisely this liberation from religious convention, the collapse of the mouldering gods, and the transcendent position of each Marquesan as his own priest that appealed to [Melville]."[2] It is true that the natives are free from excessive religious restraint: "They are either too lazy or too sensible to worry themselves about abstract points of religious belief. While I was among them they never held any synods or councils to settle the principles of their faith by agitating them. An unbounded liberty of conscience seemed to prevail."[3] Yet more important and more disturbing for Melville than this aspect of Typee religion was the fact that the Typees remained moral in their own way despite a general indifference to institutional or personal religion. Except for the sanctions of the taboo, their morality was instinctive rather than religious in nature. The comparison between this type of society and his own was too obvious for him to ignore. Despite the near absence of Typee laws, "everything went on in the valley with a harmony and smoothness unparalleled, I will venture to assert, in the most select, refined, and pious associations of mortals in Christendom."[4] Despite the absence of the "religion of love," the Typees "deal more kindly with each other, and are more humane, than many who study essays on virtue and benevolence, and who repeat every night that beautiful prayer breathed first by the lips of the divine and gentle Jesus."[1]

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[1] *Typee*, p. 179. [2] Baird, p. 100. [3] *Typee*, p. 171.

[4] *Ibid.*, p. 200.

But religion was not merely a moral system for Melville. Ideally, the moral order which religion helped man to bring to his own inner life was to be a stepping-stone to his attainment of a broader order, one which insured meaning in the universe beyond man's fragmented world of experience. What seems to have bothered Melville was that Christianity, which did aim at more than the establishment of mere instinctive morality, somehow had failed to touch in all men the simple springs of human goodness so clearly affirmed by Christ himself. This fact, revealed to him anew through his contact with a primitive society, formed the abstract basis for the most notorious aspect of Typee -- his attack upon the missionaries and the "civilization" that they brought with them. A statement from his 1859 lecture on the South Seas expresses perhaps better than any single passage in Typee his doubts about the Christianization of the islanders:

> And as for annexation, I beg to offer up an earnest prayer -- and I entreat all present and all Christians to join me in it -- that the banns of that union should be forbidden until we have found for ourselves a civilization morally, mentally, and physically higher than one which has culminated in almshouses, prisons, and hospitals.[2]

Melville's concrete objections to the Western invasion of the islands are founded in his knowledge of the results of commercial and evangelical expeditions to the Pacific: "Heaven help the 'Isles of the Sea!' -- the sympathy which Christendom feels for them has, alas! in too many instances proved their bane."[1] The process of "civilization" often meant that the natives were first polluted, morally and physically, by the less savory emissaries of Western culture; then once the islanders were seduced or bullied into submission to the white man, the missionaries arrived to convert them. But a few sentences from a review of Typee in a magazine devoted to news about the missions -- The Friend -- will show with how little understanding or even Christian charity some missionaries viewed their new flock:

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[1] Typee, p. 203.

[2] Quoted in Sealts, Melville as Lecturer, p. 180.

> If the author had erased other passages, we think he would have shown good judgment . . . . Such a course would certainly have led him to suppress some of those glaring facts respecting his habits of gross and shameless familiarity not to say unblushing licentiousness, with a tribe of debased and filthy savages of Marquesas . . . . Scores, aye, hundreds of passages might be quoted, showing that the writer sunk lower than the debased people.[2]

The sort of missionary that wrote this article, convinced that he was the messenger of the highest culture in man's social and religious history, inevitably tried to strip the islanders of their old customs and substitute a totally alien way of life. As a result, the natives became totally disoriented, left "to enjoy the mere name of Christians without experiencing any of the vital operations of true religion, whilst, at the same time, they are made the victims of the worst vices and evils of civilized life."[3]

Melville's attitude toward the missionaries, however, is not merely the result of his compassion for the Polynesians; for in the activity of some of the evangelists he saw evidence of the inability of Christianity to cope with the depth of man's evil instincts, even in its ministers. A few of the missionaries, as might be expected, cruelly and selfishly abused the natives. More widespread, however, was the practice of exaggerating in missionary reports both the savagery of the islanders and the success of the Westerners in converting and civilizing them:

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[1] Typee, p. 195.

[2] Quoted in Leyda, I, 246 (italics mine).

[3] Typee, p. 182.

> To read pathetic accounts of missionary hardships, and glowing descriptions of conversions, and baptisms taking place beneath palm-trees, is one thing; and to go to the Sandwich Islands and see the missionaries dwelling in picturesque and prettily-furnished coral-rock villas, whilst the miserable natives are committing all sorts of immoralities around them, is quite another.[1]

Melville's dismay that many missionaries would violate Christian moral standards to accomplish their ostensibly noble task must have been increased when he saw the reviews of Typee and Omoo in the religious press. The kindest of the religious critics (except for those who, for sectarian reasons, opposed evangelism) simply refused to "credit an unknown witness" against the missionaries.[2] The more violent reviewers, as we have seen, attacked Melville's morals, intelligence, and veracity. One writer even suggested, with coy cruelty, that Melville take his wedding trip to the Marquesas so that his new bride could meet Fayaway.[3] As R. H. Gabriel says: "The immediate attacks upon a book that so emphatically ran counter to prevailing preconceptions, particularly those by religious spokesmen, illumined the narrow and provincial outlook of a generation which believed that its brand of Christianity and democracy was destined one day to save the world."[4]

Melville's defense of primitive life and his diatribes against the missionaries helped make Typee popular with the more liberal elements of American and British society. They did not, on the whole, make it a better book. With justification, I think, I have placed Melville's religious and social commentary within the structural framework of the work. But the main reason that his views seem to "fit" into that structure is not so much that he deliberately made them integral to the book's development but that, in actuality, his attitudes arose from the situations and tensions which are found, fictionalized, in Typee. The fact is that Typee almost automatically divides itself into two books -- a fictional personal narrative and a somewhat polemic examination of social and religious conditions in an exotic land. With the exception of the subdued allegorical implications of Melville's treatment of native religion, one can discuss the second "book," as I have done, with almost no reference to the first. The major problem with the expression of Melville's religious thought in Typee, then, is not that personal opinion (propaganda, if you will) is necessarily inartistic but that the opinion fails to maintain a sufficient structural union with the narrative.

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[1] Typee, p. 198. [2] Leyda, I, 212. [3] Ibid., p. 371.

[4] Ralph Henry Gabriel, The Course of American Democratic Thought (2nd ed. rev., New York, 1956), p. 74.

The source of this disunity in Typee is twofold. In the first place, Melville had not yet learned to control the rapid development of his thought in print, to integrate the intellectual and the artistic quests. Typee is indeed the medium of Melville's thought; but the book does not embody the commentary, it carries it. A disclaimer in the preface to Omoo that "if reflections are occasionally indulged in, they are spontaneous, and such as would very probably suggest themselves to the most casual observer"[1] is uncomfortably close to the truth. Too often Melville's comments are "spontaneous" reactions, written for their own sake rather than prompted by the progress of the narrative itself. The second source of the lack of unity in Typee is the duality of the form which Melville chose for his first book. The combination of the travel-book and the novel apparently gave Melville too much scope for his random "reactions" by creating a duality of focus evident in his preface to Typee. The book, he indicates, will concern itself first of all with "stirring adventure";[1] but there will also be an exposé of the actions of the missionaries and other Westerners in the South Seas. Melville claims that these latter sections of the book are "based upon facts admitting of no contradiction, and which have come immediately under the writer's cognizance."[2] This claim, however, is untrue unless we stretch the meaning of "cognizance" to its farthest limits. The fact is that Melville borrowed much of his information from hearsay and written accounts and that he inserted it into Typee merely to substantiate his premeditated attack upon the despoilers of the Pacific (as he thought of them), and the book is full of anecdotes having little or nothing to do with the main subject matter of Typee itself. Melville admits this fact in his preface but excuses himself: "The great interest with which the important events lately occurring at the Sandwich, Marquesas, and Society Islands, have been regarded in America and England, and indeed throughout the world, will, he trusts, justify a few otherwise unwarrantable digressions."[3] Melville's justification of his digressions on these grounds is, to say the least, open to question.

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[1] Herman Melville, Omoo ("Standard Edition"; London, 1922, vol. II), p. ix.

Soon after its publication, Melville was forced to recognize that Typee lacked focus, that the reader's attention was inevitably divided between narrative and commentary. By the summer of 1846 the firm of Wiley and Putnam, Melville's American publishers, was preparing an expurgated version of the controversial book; and Melville's letters on the subject are revealing. On July 15, 1846, he writes to John Murray, his English publisher:

> The revision will only extend to the exclusion of those parts not

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[1] Typee, p. xiii. [2] Ibid., p. xiv. [3] Ibid.

> naturally connected with the narrative, and some slight purifications of style. I am persuaded that the interest of the book almost wholly consists in the intrinsick merit of the narrative alone -- & that other portions, however interesting they may be in themselves, only serve to impede the story. The book is certainly calculated for popular reading, or for none at all. -- If the first, why then, all passages which are calculated to offend the tastes, or offer violance to the feelings of any large class of readers are certainly objectionable.
>
> -- Proceeding on this principle then, I have rejected every thing, in revising the book, which refers to the missionaries.[1]

This statement has the ring of a rationalization after the fact, a speech learned by rote from John Wiley. Yet it shows not only that Melville wanted Typee to be financially successful but also that he had begun to realize that the natural focus of the book, as it was written, was on the narrative itself. In September, however, having received Murray's comment on the expurgation, Melville seemed to fear that he had been time-serving: "I am extremely happy that you acquiese in the propriety of the revision of Typee, and only fear that possibly you may not fully approve the extent to which it has been carried. Nevertheless I think I have done right."[2] It may have been at this early point in his career that Melville began to see the vital truth that what makes a book popular is often not what makes it significant, that in fact his own unconscious focus from the beginning had been the social and religious commentary which had been expunged. Never again would he feel unsure enough of his own artistic standpoint to be able to justify censorship of his work on allegedly artistic rather than purely financial grounds.[3] Never again would he make "thought" (in Aristotle's sense) dependent upon narrative. From Omoo onward we observe in his books an increasingly successful attempt to integrate artistic and intellectual questing into unified narrative structures which retain the scope necessary for his digressive technique without becoming diffuse. The irrelevance of the "Appendix" in Typee gives way to the thematic importance of "The Town-Ho Story" in Moby-Dick or the Enceladus dream in Pierre.

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[1] Letters, p. 39.

[2] Ibid., p. 44.

[3] In Omoo Melville was to lean heavily on Evert Duyckinck for literary advice, and he finally decided to cut several chapters from the manuscript. But once this apprenticeship was over, and once he had shifted his unorthodox views into the subtle realm of symbols, he allowed no more major expurgation of his work.

Omoo

By the time he finished Omoo Melville was well on his way toward solving some of the problems he had encountered in Typee. For this reason, Omoo is closer in structure and tone to Redburn, White-Jacket, and Moby-Dick than it is to Melville's first book. The narrator's release from the confinement of the Typee valley is accompanied by a loosening of the structure in Omoo. The suspenseful terseness of Typee is replaced by a broadly comic tone; and the canvas is at once wider and more crowded with characters as lively as any in Typee. The narrator himself is less melancholic, more high-spirited and whimsical than he was in the first book. Of the two sections of Omoo, the first concerns itself with the Julia's voyage to Tahiti and the mutiny of her men, a successful skirmish with maritime law led by the narrator and his inevitable companion, Long Ghost. If this half of the book foreshadows the style and subject matter of Redburn and White-Jacket, the second part seems at times like a practice session for Mardi. Freed from service on the Julia and out of the effective control of the Tahitian authorities, the narrator and Long Ghost become peripatetic observers of and participants in Polynesian life. Within such a loose narrative structure, and with the results of the Western invasion of the islands before him, so to speak, Melville was able in *Omoo* to keep his analysis and judgment of the Western influence within the scope of the novel.

Melville had found a narrative form and tone more congenial to his aims and powers than that of *Typee*; but *Omoo* seems pale beside the earlier book, as much for modern readers as it did for Melville's contemporaries. The main reason is that Melville loosened his structure too much. In *Omoo* the internal tensions which directed the course of *Typee* are gone, and no dynamic narrative force replaces them. Living up to its title only too well, *Omoo* "wanders" into an episodic form which, once the *Julia* leaves Tahiti, moves only sporadically and in no particular direction. The book~~s~~ seems to suffer simultaneously from a strict adherence to irrelevant biographical detail and a certain amount of padding. The comic tone is mildly entertaining but seldom salient. In general, Melville gave himself the additional freedom of movement that he craved after *Typee* but found that, for the moment, he had nowhere significant to go.[1]

Though the religious commentary in *Omoo* seems initially to participate in the general drabness of the novel, it is not merely a repetition of what Melville had said in *Typee*. There are differences between the two books in the presentation of Melville's thought and in the thought itself. In the first place, the setting of *Omoo* and the peregrinations of its main characters bring the reader face to face with the conditions Melville wishes to examine. One cannot speak merely of the failures or the victories of Christianity and civilization as Melville views them in *Omoo*; it is necessary to mention names, to refer to incidents. Melville's protests, therefore, though less strident and more humorous at times than in Typee, are more direct and powerful. To be sure, he is often as "preachy" in Omoo as he is in Typee (in the two-chapter account of "Tahiti as It Is," for example); but the main force of his arguments is carried by living human characters.

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[1] The fact that Melville was dissatisfied with the possibilities in the subject matter of *Typee* and *Omoo* is borne out by his impatient flight into the "fogs" of *Mardi*.

Secondly, though the religious subject matter of Omoo is generally the same as that of Typee, the emphasis of many of Melville's comments has changed. Because he is dealing with natives allegedly civilized in part, he belabors the contrast between civilization and primitive life less than in Typee. The missionaries, however, fare worse than in the first book. The missionaries, says Melville, have "in their own way at least, laboured hard to make a Christian people of their charges."[1] However, the nobility of the missionaries' intentions in general is vitiated, according to Melville, by the flaws in many in their ranks. First of all, Melville would say, they fail to recognize the true place of religion in man's life; therefore, they teach a perverted form of worship. Assuming that their own moral standard is the only correct one, and that everything the natives do is essentially evil, they proscribe the native forms of amusement, leaving the way open for the islanders to indulge in more vicious types of entertainment.[2] Then, having stripped the natives of their "immoral" customs, the evangelists promote a system of hypocrisy by insisting that their converts adopt all the outward forms of Christianity. Pleased with their "progress," they ignore the fact that native spies are employed to enforce church attendance and search out immorality and that these very informers accept bribes from a terrified populace. The missionaries pay little attention to the natives' personal commitment to Christianity and its message of love, a commitment to a spirit rather than to a set of conventions. As a result the natives are not Christians; they are statistics for missionary magazines. In effect, the missionaries are creating a copy of the vapid, instinctive hypocrisy to be found in Western Christendom.

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[1] Omoo, p. 219. [2] Ibid., pp. 216-217.

Moreover, the lives of many of the missionaries and other Western Christians on Tahiti are anything but exemplary to the natives. Throughout Omoo, Wilson, the Consul of Tahiti, is a symbol of injustice, deceit, and dishonesty; yet he is a leading member of the church. The missionaries themselves engage in activity directly contrary to the teachings of Christ. Just prior to the Julia's arrival, the Protestant evangelists had badly mistreated two Catholic priests, finally goading the natives into driving them from the island. Melville, however, refuses to defend the priests completely: "Under far better auspices, they might have settled upon some one of the thousand unconverted isles of the Pacific, rather than have forced themselves thus upon a people already professedly Christians."[1] Three priests have returned to the island at the time of the Julia's visit; and one of them, Father Murphy, is quite a genial character. But he and his companions have their faults also:

> Here lived the priests; and very comfortably too. They looked sanctimonious enough abroad; but that went for nothing: since at home, in their retreat, they were a club of Friar Tucks; holding priestly wassail over many a good cup of red brandy, and rising late in the morning.
>
> Pity it was they couldn't marry -- pity for the ladies of the island, I mean, and the cause of morality; for what business had the ecclesiastical old bachelors, with such a set of trim little native handmaidens? These damsels were their first converts; and devoted ones they were.[2]

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[1] Omoo, p. 147. [2] Ibid, p. 167.

His tone comic rather than righteously angry, Melville is protesting here not against sexual immorality but against the moral exploitation of the natives. The vivid sermon at the Church of the Cocoa-Nuts also imposes upon the simplicity of the islanders by telling them that their misfortunes are due to their "sins" and that all the people in England are happy and prosperous because they obey their religious leaders. To Melville, who had seen the slums of Liverpool, such a lie must have seemed particularly monstrous.

The conclusion that Melville draws from his observation of the natives themselves is that their temporal welfare has been damaged considerably by the advent of civilization without any corresponding gain in their spiritual awareness. It is in his portrayal of the religious condition of the islanders that Melville most successfully allows character and incident to voice his criticisms for him. The quiet statement that the natives chiefs made the Julia "taboo" "to prevent the disorderly scenes and facilities for desertion which would ensue were the natives . . . allowed to come off to us freely"[1] is a striking indication that the missionaries have failed to instill even enough Western morality in their converts to protect them from the onslaughts of debauched sailors. From this early point in the novel onward, Melville presents example after example of moral shallowness in the native Christians. Arheeto, an upstanding member of the Church, asks the narrator to forge a set of sailing certificates for him. A young Tahitian girl explains that her religious life is somewhat compartmentalized:

> "Mickonaree ena" (church member here), exclaimed she, laying her hand upon her mouth, and a strong emphasis on the adverb. In the same way, and with similar exclamations, she touched her eyes and hands. This done, her whole air changes in an instant; and she gave me to understand, by unmistakable gestures, that in certain other respects she was not exactly a "mickonaree."[2]

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[1] Omoo, p. 24. [2] Ibid., pp. 210-211.

The portrait of Kooloo, the mercenary "tayo" of the narrator, is particularly important in Melville's examination of the state of Christianity on Tahiti. The concept of "tayo," of the intimate, persevering friendship between two men, was an ideal that Melville pursued (vainly) throughout his life. In retrospect it must have seemed tragic to him that the coming of the religion of love to the islands had vitiated this custom to the point where a native like Kooloo, a Christian, would desert his tayo for a more wealthy "friend." The touching loyalty of the cannibal Kory-Kory in Typee stands in ironic contrast to Kooloo's fickleness. Finally, Melville's account of the holy wars of the debauched King Pomare II reveals that the Christians have already begun to instruct the natives in some of their more subtle vices -- bigotry and religious persecution. Melville's lengthy description of the family of Po-Po, the honest, pious islander with whom the narrator and Long Ghost reside for a while, is perhaps the most effective criticism of the missionaries in Omoo; for through one group of characters Melville not only shows what a blessing to his fellow men a true Christian can be but at the same time throws into relief the weakness of the rest of Tahitian Christendom. His final comment on Po-Po is a devastating indictment in itself:

> After becoming familiarised with the almost utter destitution of anything like practical piety upon these islands, what I observed in our host's house astonished me much. But whatever others might have been, Po-Po was, in truth, a Christian: the only one, Arfretee excepted, whom I personally knew to be such, among all the natives of Polynesia.[1]

It would be easy to assume that Melville's criticisms of religion as practiced in Tahiti and the Western world were in fact an indirect attack on

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[1] Omoo, p. 332.

Christianity itself or religion in general. Such is not the case, however. His dismay at the fact that Christianity does not seem to inhibit man's inherent evil and his recognition of the difficulty of being a true Christian later induced him to abandon the religious ideal; but at this point he concerned himself almost totally with the moral failure of Christians to be what they profess to be. In Typee he had shown that a primitive moral code instinctively obeyed is far preferable to a conventional Christian standard hypocritically flouted. In Omoo he expanded this judgment into a vivid portrayal of the truth that Christianity can be detrimental to moral and spiritual well-being if it is accepted as mere form rather than as a way of life. As James Baird paraphrases Melville's attitude: "Christianity as devised, tempered, fitted, and imposed by the Church as Christian convention is not worth carrying anywhere."[1] In part, Mardi is an attempt at a delineation of the type of non-conventional, basic Christianity which Melville saw as the only religious antidote to the emptiness of "Christendom."

In Typee Melville had criticized Western Christian society by contrasting it with life in a village of cannibals. In Omoo he moved closer to Mardi by satirizing Western culture, in effect, by showing it transplanted to an alien environment. The half-civilized natives are caricatures of the foibles and vices of the Western world. Yet if the Typees were more virtuous in their way than Christians, if their society was more orderly than ours, if the Tahitians would have been better off without the arrival of civilization, why did Melville leave his Pacific Eden? This question was asked by Melville's critics after the publication of Typee and Omoo; and, in a different form, it is still an important problem for the student of

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[1] Baird, p. 99.

Melville's work. It is futile and perhaps irrelevant to speculate about Melville's deepest psychological reasons for leaving the islands, but they may be similar to what appear to be his reasons for rejecting the primitive way of life presented in his novels.[1] At the beginning of Omoo the narrator makes it clear that his emotions upon escaping from the Typees were ambivalent:

> But how far short of our expectations is oftentimes the fulfilment of the most ardent hopes. Safe aboard of a ship -- so long my earnest prayer -- with home and friends once more in prospect, I nevertheless felt weighed down by a melancholy that could not be shaken off. It was the thought of never more seeing those who, notwithstanding their desire to retain me a captive, had, upon the whole, treated me so kindly. I was leaving them forever.[2]

But the fact remains that Tommo's effort at assimilation with the Typees had failed and that his final, horrible confirmation that his captors were indeed cannibals had made such a union unthinkable. The feeling of being hopelessly trapped and the desire to escape are the powerful emotions around which the latter half of Typee is structured -- emotions powerful enough to make Tommo abandon Fayaway and Kory-Kory almost coldly, powerful enough to induce him to impale a pursuing Typee chief. Why?

James E. Miller answers this question in a manner representative of most Melville scholars: "Such a life [as that of the Typees] might be happy, but for one of restless intellect it cannot seem very significant. So nearly devoid of any life of the mind or of the spirit, the Typees seem subhuman, closer to fine healthy instinctive animals than to human beings."[1] Reflections such as this one surely must have contributed to the formation of Melville's final attitude toward primitive life. Unconscious morality and comparative restfulness and harmony were not, for Melville, the highest ideals of man. W. E. Sedgwick contends (as the title of his book, The Tragedy of Mind, suggests) that Melville always looked back with longing to the Typee valley because he felt trapped by the Western tradition of intense intellection and self-consciousness. Melville, who knew the dangers inherent in this tradition, would probably not have seen his situation in this light. While it may be true that he could not overcome his inherited religious and intellectual attitudes sufficiently to accept a primitive way of thought (as opposed to some aspects of primitive symbolism), it is also true that the primitive point of view would not have seemed to him worth having. For Melville, man's attempt to raise himself not only above the level of the animal but also above the limitations of common human existence was the central activity of his fullest nature.

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[1] In the light of James Baird's excellent book on Melville's primitivism, perhaps I should not treat this rejection as a mere matter of fact. Nevertheless, it seems to me that throughout his life Melville remained immersed too deeply in a Christian tradition to have accepted primitivism as his fundamental vision of the world.

[2] Omoo, p. 7.

But Melville's literary escape from the Typees was not merely a cold-blooded rejection of the cannibals on philosophical grounds. A deeper, more emotional aspect of the very attitude in Melville that I have been discussing also contributed to his movement away from primitivism. For if the primitive life lacked certain refinements that Melville found desirable, it had certain positive dangers as well. A key to Melville's recognition of this fact is found early in Omoo, in a strange passage describing a beachcomber encountered by the crew of the Julia:

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[1] James E. Miller, A Reader's Guide to Herman Melville (New York, 1962), pp. 31-32.

> Some of us gazed upon this man with a feeling akin to horror, no ways abated when informed that he had voluntarily submitted to this embellishment of his countenance. What an impress! Far worse than Cain's -- his was, perhaps, a wrinkle, or a freckle, which some of our modern cosmetics might have effaced; but the blue shark was a mark indelible, which all the waters of Abana and Pharpar, rivers of Damascus, could never wash out.[1]

The revulsion revealed by this comment sounds odd in the writings of a man who so vehemently maintained that the barbarians were not, as many thought, devils in disguise. Yet the same emotion is evident in Tommo's reaction to the Typee tattooer's suggestion that he be branded:

> Horrified at the bare thought of being rendered hideous for life if the wretch were to execute his purpose upon me, I struggled to get away from him, while Kory-Kory, turning traitor, stood by, and besought me to comply with the outrageous request.
>
> . . . .
>
> A fact which I soon afterwards learned augmented by apprehension. The whole system of tattooing was, I found, connected with their religion; and it was evident, therefore, that they were resolved to make a convert of me.[2]

At another point in Typee, in describing the area around the the Ti, Tommo notes that the "frightful genius of pagan worship seemed to brood in silence over the place, breathing its spell upon every object around."[3]

We begin to see here that Tommo's nervousness throughout his stay with the Typees and the melancholy with which he reacts to his captivity are not merely the result of fears that he will be eaten by his captors. For the most part he dreads not such a predictable or imminent danger but the possibility that the Typees, gentle one moment and vicious the next, will turn without warning and destroy him. In other words, despite his admiration for them, Tommo (and I think by 1846 Melville also) feared primitive peoples themselves. Melville seems to have realized that men like the Typees -- their life basically sensual and their emotions, good and bad, capable of being translated almost immediately into action -- were living personifications of the anarchic, unthinking force that lay in all men. It was against this force, reflected in the mindless power of nature, that man had to struggle through religion or other means if he wished to bring lasting order and meaning into his life. For if he gave way to the chaotic elements within him, man could not hope to establish a communion with any order transcending himself. It was impossible, then, for Melville to unite himself physically or spiritually with the Typees. Unfortunately the end of Typee was not a resolution of man's relationship with the chaos within him; it was merely an escape from the problem. Melville would again have to confront powerful inner disorder, the next time in the civilized setting of Pierre. It is interesting that Professor Sedgwick contends that Melville's contrast of primitivism with civilization is actually one "between youth and maturity, between the carefree vagabondage of mostly sensual being and the rigors of intellectual and spiritual self-consciousness."[1] It was precisely in these two areas -- the "well of childhood" and the sensual passions -- that Melville would wage his battle against his fears that man is forever divided, forever unable to transcend himself.

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[1] Omoo, pp. 32-33. [2] Typee, pp. 218, 220. [3] Ibid., p. 91.

It is significant that Omoo begins directly after Tommo's successful escape from the Typees. For already in Omoo there is evident Melville's loss of interest not in his Polynesian material but in the potentialities of primitive life itself. He may speak primarily of Tahitian characters, but his attention has turned almost completely to the Western culture and religion which he so often criticized. His next book, a Polynesian "romance," is an allegory concerned with the Western heritage about which he will write for the rest of his life. In his lecture on the South Seas, he makes it clear that the only reason he considers valid for taking up residence in the Pacific is a desire to escape from the evils of Western civilization. But he himself chose not to escape, chose rather to pursue a path toward what he hoped would be intellectual and spiritual progress. In Tahiti John La Farge recognized this desire in his own life:

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[1] Sedgwick, The Tragedy of Mind, p. 29.

> . . . I think that a mere dreamer like myself can be excused for turning to more scientific and accurate arrangements of men's history.
>
> These words come to me more distinctly suggested by the place in which I am, not because I am thinking of the ancient ways that I touch, but because I remember how Melville passed from those records of exterior life and scenery to a dwelling within his mind -- a following out of metaphysical ideas, and a scheming of possible evolution in the future of man.[1]

Yet few people in Melville's own time could grasp the fact of this process in the writer of Typee. Titus Munson Coan, visiting Melville in 1859, bemoaned the fact that "he would not repeat the experiences of which I had been reading with rapture in his books. In vain I sought to hear of Typee and those Paradise islands, but he preferred to pour forth his philosophy and his theories of life. The shade of Aristotle rose like a cold mist between myself and Fayaway."[2] What Coan and others of Melville's age could not understand was that he had sailed from those islands into a world more challenging and more dangerous than that of the cannibals, a world from which he could never return.

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[1] Quoted in Leyda, II, 833. [2] Ibid., p. 605.

Chapter III

MARDI: THE UNENVIABLE ISLES

> Some lurking thing he hoped to gain --
> Slip quite beyond the parrot-lore
> Conventional, and -- what attain?
>
> (Clarel, I, xxxi, 36-38.)

One need not wait for Melville to launch into overt allegory to discover that Mardi is a book separated from Omoo by more than a time span of two years. From the very first words -- "We are off!" -- it is marked by an intellectual and imaginative intensity unparalleled in Melville's first two novels. Despite its length, despite its meandering form, there is an underlying sense of urgency about this book -- a compulsion to ask question after question and a foreboding that satisfactory answers will not be forthcoming. Its style is free and adventurous, if not always graceful. Its narrator is more like the highly sophisticated Ishmael than the bumptious "Typee" of Omoo or the harried Tommo. Though he is more dandyish and verbose than the narrator of Moby-Dick, the "I" of Mardi exhibits in embryo Ishmael's facility for finding significance in absolutely everything. The man who will later be known as Taji seems instinctively to see a calm at sea in terms of metaphysics or a shark as an illustration of the theological problem of evil in God's creation.

What lay behind this turning point in Melville's career? Merrell

Davis and Leon Howard, among others, have contended quite convincingly that Melville's dissatisfaction with the sales of his first two books, his recent marriage to Lizzie and close intellectual association with his sister Augusta, and his extremely heavy program of reading all contributed significantly to the form and content of Mardi as it was finally written. Perhaps more important for this study is the fact that in Mardi Melville began to explore the murky depths of his mind and that the novel became the medium for his "diving." Outside of the book itself, perhaps the best index to this process of maturation is to be found in Melville's letters before and during the writing of Mardi.

In early February of 1847, two months before the publication of Omoo, the soon-to-be-married Melville went to Washington with false hopes of obtaining a position in the Treasury Department. Having failed in his mission, he seems to have decided quite firmly that he would thenceforward support his wife and himself by his pen. On March 31, he writes to John Murray: "If 'Omoo' succeeds I shall follow it up by something else, immediately."[1] The fruits of Melville's choice of profession become evident almost at once. On June 19, he replies to Richard Bentley, a London publisher from whom he has received overtures concerning his next book, that he is not free to bargain with him but that he would be interested in learning ("in confidence") "at what value you would hold the English copy right of a new work of South Sea adventure, by me, occupying entirely fresh ground."[2] Having taken this small step toward protecting himself against a failure in negotiations with Murray, his present English publisher, Melville proceeds to use Bentley's offer as a bargaining weapon against Murray himself. Indeed the whole letter of October 29 to Murray indicates that Melville, in his two years as a writer, has learned many of the rules of the perpetual battle between author and publisher. He voices frankly his dissatisfaction with the financial arrangement for Omoo, and he suggests a more expensive format for his next book. As he explains to Murray, "circumstances paramount to every other consideration, force me to regard my literary affairs in a strong pecuniary light."[1]

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[1] Letters, p. 59. [2] Ibid., p. 64.

There is nothing in either the letter to Bentley or that to Murray on October 29 to suggest anything unusual in Melville's conception of his next book. The phrase "on entirely fresh ground" in the Bentley letter may be merely an attempt to arouse interest or may indicate a more highly colored treatment of his materials than his readers had been used to. In any case, Melville feels confident enough of his purpose to promise Murray to have the book completed by the spring of 1848 "certainly." Even a letter to Murray on January 1, 1848, indicates no radical change in Melville's outlook. Again he merely hints at a more "imaginative" approach to his work, saying that his "plan . . . clothes the whole subject in new attractions & combines in one cluster all that is romantic, whimsical & poetic in Polynesia."[2] Indeed the letter as a whole is an attempt to extract from Murray the offer of more money: "The arrangement you propose for my next book is not altogether satisfactory to me."[3] But on March 25 Melville writes to Murray a letter announcing the existence, at least in its author's mind, of the book that was to become Mardi. Merrell Davis appears to be close to the truth when he speculates that between January 1 and March 25 Yillah, who may have been introduced as a Romantic "gift" to Lizzie and Augusta, escaped

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[1] Letters, p. 67. [2] Ibid., p. 68. [3] Ibid., p. 67.

Melville's complete control.[1] He allowed his imagination to be captured by the implications of what he had written, just as he seems to have done during the composition of Moby-Dick. He recognized that the book he was writing was something essentially different from what he had planned; and instead of changing the manuscript to fit his original intention, he revised his plan to fit the "new" book.

Melville's March 25 letter shows that he knew that his new plan would not meet with Murray's approval. He offers the rather specious argument that a "romance" would be proof that the first two books were indeed "true"; but he cannot resist adding that Mardi will not "sink in the comparison, but shall be better -- I mean as a literary achievement, & so essentially different from those two books."[2] The fact is that, while Melville may sincerely have believed that Mardi's new format might increase reader interest, his transformation of the book was not essentially pragmatic. It seems rather to have derived from a change in his understanding of "truth." He tells Murray that the skepticism concerning Typee and Omoo induced him to show his readers that "a real romance of mine is no Typee or Omoo."[3] Reflected in this statement is Melville's earlier definition of truth. Quite aware that he took extensive liberties with biography in his first two books (especially in Typee), he nevertheless insisted indignantly that he was writing the "truth." He knew that he had written about real people and real experiences, whether he had known or undergone them himself or not. He knew that his imaginative embellishments merely served to heighten the reality, to provide forceful examples of the way things were in fact. He knew, therefore, that Typee and Omoo had been accurate portrayals of Polynesian life as he had experienced and heard about it.

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[1] Merrell R. Davis, Melville's "Mardi": A Chartless Voyage (New Haven, 1952), p. 59.

[2] Letters, p. 71.

[3] Ibid., p. 70.

In Chapter II, I have contended that Melville chafed at precisely this type of "factual" writing and recognized that his mind was led inevitably to a deeper level of reality. Moreover he was irritated that even friendly critics spent so much time disbelieving his adventures and even his existence that they missed the significance of what he was telling them, missed the basic truthfulness of his presentation. Melville describes to Murray the result of these congruent emotions:

> Well: proceeding in my narrative of facts I began to feel an incurible distaste for the same; & a longing to plume my pinions for a flight, & felt irked, cramped & fettered by plodding along with dull common places, -- So suddenly [abandoning] the thing alltogether, I went to work heart & soul at a romance . . . .[1]

It was this "romance" that Melville felt was such a departure from his previous work that he wished to "separate [it] as much as possible" from his first two novels.[2] There is more to Melville's well-known preface to Mardi than pique. He had come to the conclusion that "fiction" not only could be but should be "received for a verity."

In his contrast between the "romance" and the portrayal of "facts" in fiction, and in his use of allegory in Mardi, Melville may seem to share Hawthorne's artistic viewpoint at this point in his career. But Mardi itself is proof that Melville's concept of art differed radically from Hawthorne's. Melville, like Hawthorne, thought that the "romance" gave the artist more freedom in the presentation of his material. But for Hawthorne, the raw material was "reality" or "truth," and the "romance" allowed the author "to present that truth under circumstances" of his "own choosing or creation."[1] As he says in his preface to The Scarlet Letter, the imagination acts as does moonlight on the familiar objects of a room, taking them out of the "real world" into a realm between "the Actual and the Imaginary," spiritualizing them until "they seem to lose their actual substance."[2] Through this process, Hawthorne believed, the artist could reach a certain kind of universally understandable truth, often expressed through allegory, itself a mixture of the "actual" and the imaginary or intellectual.

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[1] Letters, p. 70. [2] Ibid., p. 76.

For Melville, however, both man's perception and its object contribute to the knowing process. For him the imagination does not color truth or make it more evident; it creates truth in its action upon the world of fact. Neither fact nor imagination is meaningful without the other. Thus Melville's "romance" was neither an escape from fact nor a heightening of truth. It was a form within which the imagination could probe the "other" and bring it into relation with man himself. The allegory in Mardi seems so forced, so unsuccessful because the form demands precisely what Melville did not possess -- certainty. The allegorist begins with certain truths or insights into human life which he then tries to express in an interesting or powerful way. But no pre-ordained truth guides Mardi. To the chaotic world of his experience and his intellectual questionings Melville brought Polynesian legends as well as the myth and wisdom of Western civilization; and from the action of his creative imagination upon this potpourri he hoped to create an order meaningful to himself. We are puzzled by Yillah because, in the strict sense of the term, she is symbolic (and vaguely so), not allegorical. Rather than being representative of one ideal or characteristic, or even of a consistent system of values, she is a living embodiment of the mysteries of the world that bothered Melville most. As such she seems to have revealed to her creator not answers but further questions as the book progressed. It is at this point in the creation of Mardi that Melville loses control of his book. Yillah and the other characters are forced to bear the burden of Melville's rapidly expanding awareness of his world, and most of them become less self-perpetuating symbols than challenges hurled against the world to yield up its meaning to a tortured mind. The problem in Mardi is similar to that in Pierre; Melville and his book are not clearly separable.

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[1] Nathaniel Hawthorne, The Complete Novels and Selected Tales of Nathaniel Hawthorne, edited by Norman Holmes Pearson (New York, 1937), p. 243.

[2] Ibid., p. 105.

Mardi, then, is a seriously flawed book. Yet it is fascinating as a novel which marks a new phase in Melville's early career, which introduces several themes that are to become central in his writing, and which flashes at times with the rhetorical brilliance of Moby-Dick. Indeed the opening thirty-eight chapters are dominated by a narrator who, in many ways, foreshadows Ishmael. In Mardi Melville shows his usual disdain for the technical aspects of point of view. It is unreasonable that Taji, who seems bent on suicide at the end of the book, could come to write his memoirs so coolly. Moreover, once the quest for Yillah begins, the man to whom the search means the most and for whom it is organized becomes nearly dumb, if not invisible. Nevertheless, we must attend to Taji if we are to understand the forces at work in Mardi. We cannot know how much revision the opening chapters of the book underwent after Melville's change of plans late in 1847; but we can assume that it was not totally re-written. Yet there is already evident a profound deepening of Melville's approach to his materials. He has made his narrator more sophisticated, more intellectually aware of himself and his world than Tommo or Typee. For example, what the narrator sees in the first calm "tempts him to recant his belief in the eternal fitness of things . . . . At first he is taken by surprise, never having dreamt of a state of existence where existence itself seems suspended . . . . But it is a calm, and he grows madly sceptical . . . . Thoughts of eternity thicken. He begins to feel anxious concerning his soul."[1] These passages are too jocular, too dandyish to be compared favorably with Ishmael's discussion of whiteness. Even so, Melville's peculiar vision of the interrelation of the world of experience and the world of mind, a concept far different from Emerson's, is always evident in the narrator's attitude toward his environment.

The man who is to become Taji, then, stands somewhere between Tommo and Ishmael. But he shares with all of Melville's seagoing heroes the situation of being an isolato on his ship. Like Tommo, White-Jacket, and Ishmael he is intellectually superior to his mates: "There was no soul a magnet to mine; none with whom to mingle sympathies."[2] Among Melville's early heroes, only White-Jacket, who has some sensitive friends on the _Neversink_, and Ishmael, who seems to need only Ahab's brooding presence to be spiritually stimulated, escape the intellectual stagnation of sea life. For the narrator of _Mardi_ the situation is like that of a calm, inescapable and yet not to be borne. So disturbing is his entrapment to him that he takes seriously the captain's whimsical suggestion to leave the _Arcturion_.

It seems strange at first that a man driven to abandon ship hundreds of miles from shore by a lack of communion with his fellows would choose a crew member to accompany him. But Jarl is more to the narrator of Mardi than simply a necessary partner in a hazardous undertaking. Melville enthrones Jarl as the descendant of the Norse kings, an heir to the wisdom and valor of the ages. As a king become a seaman, he is an example of the dignity and worth of all men. As Melville portrays him, Jarl represents the stability of common human standards, standards not only prudential but moral in nature. Significantly the narrator assumes the validity of Jarl's honest but conventional morality from the start of their relationship. In his own words, the "Skyeman seemed so earnest and upright a seaman, that to tell the plain truth, in spite of his love for me, I had many misgivings as to his readiness to unite in an undertaking which apparently savoured of a moral dereliction."[1] With the example of Jarl before him, the narrator seems unable to escape the specter of wrongdoing which hovers over his deeds. He has already been suspiciously defensive about his desertion: "But to split no hairs on this point, let me say, that were I placed in the same situation again, I would repeat the thing I did then."[2] Now, speaking of Jarl's anticipated reaction, he claims that any misdemeanor in his plan is "venial."[3] In order to make good their escape, he and Jarl pretent to have fallen overboard, but the success of their plan disturbs him: "'Man overboard! Man overboard!' My heart smote me as the human cry of horror came out of the black vaulted night."[4] Later he is bothered by the disappearance of the

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[1] Herman Melville, _Mardi_ (2 vols.; "Standard Edition"; London, 1922, vol. III), pp. 9, 10. Cited hereafter by title and volume number of the novel, not the full edition.

[2] _Mardi_, I, 3.

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[1] Mardi, I, 19. [2] Ibid., p. 7.

[3] Tommo also justifies his desertion to the reader, but never does he view it as potentially immoral.

[4] Mardi, I, 33.

Arcturion after his desertion:

> But life is sweet to all, death comes as hard. And for myself I am almost tempted to hang my head, that I escaped the fate of my shipmates . . . . Though I cannot repress a shudder when I think of that old ship's end, it is impossible for me so much as to imagine that our deserting her could have been in any way instrumental in her loss. Nevertheless, I would to Heaven the Arcturion still floated; that it was given me once more to tread her familiar decks.[1]

While the narrator is involving himself in a course of action which disturbs his conscience, where is the steady Jarl? Can he not help his comrade? In his very description of Jarl, the narrator has indirectly answered this question. No man can share his "world" with another: "'Man and boy,' said honest Jarl, 'I have lived ever since I can remember.' And truly, who may call to mind when he was not? To ourselves, we all seem coeval with creation. Whence it comes, that it is so hard to die, ere the world itself is departed."[2] Ultimately one man is alienated from another because each is "inscrutable": "Ah, Jarl! an honest, earnest wight; so true and simple, that the secret operations of thy soul were more inscrutable than the subtle workings of Spinoza's."[3] Even at the beginning of their association, then, the evidence begins to accumulate that Jarl's simple wisdom will be powerless to aid the narrator in any meaningful way. Jarl, though a member of the "kingly commons," is merely a Typee with manners. Like the Dansker in Billy Budd (who is indeed much wiser), Jarl can only observe and comment upon whatever the spiritual isolato decides to do. He prudently advises the narrator against his mad scheme of desertion, but in the end he follows the younger man. He joins Taji in the quest for Yillah, but he has no understanding or appreciation of its purpose. Intellectually and emotionally inert, Jarl ironically personifies the very torpor that causes the narrator to leave the ship. The narrator's almost constant feelings of remorse and Jarl's inability to deliver him from evil foreshadow one of the major themes of the book -- the loss of innocence. Accompanied by a father figure whose chief characteristic is silence, the narrator abandons the "maternal *Arcturion*"[1] and goes forth to meet a world of moral ambiguity, a world before which he is doomed to falter.

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[1] Mardi, I, 30. [2] Ibid., p. 13. [3] Ibid., p. 15.

During the first part of their journey to the meeting with Aleema, the two adventurers are alone in a small boat on the open sea. The account of this sixteen-day period seems better fitted to the narrative and thematic focus of *Moby-Dick* than that of *Mardi*; for, while *Mardi* has as its primary subject the virtues and vices of humankind, the voyage of the "chamois" concerns itself, like much of *Moby-Dick*, with the moral and aesthetic implications of the physical world. *Mardi*'s narrator, employing the mixture of naturalistic observation, pseudo-scientific speculation, and overt symbolism familiar to readers of *Moby-Dick*, attempts to come to grips with the power and beauty which surround him at sea. The result of his effort seems to be the same sort of ambivalent awe evidenced by Ishmael. The loneliness of the ocean combines with the silence of Jarl to irritate him; but the closeness to the mighty sea itself inspires a different emotion: "Somehow, and suddenly, a sense of peril so intense came over me, that it could hardly have been aggravated by the completest solitude."[2] Yet, the narrator insists in the chapter on sharks that fear must be kept within bounds: "As well hate a seraph as a shark. Both were made by the same hand."[3] The brief attention paid in this statement to the ultimate source of the shark's nature, an important aspect of the conflict in Moby-Dick, may have sparked the narrator's comment on the practicality of violently opposing such a nature:

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[1] *Mardi*, I, 29. Note the similarity to the silent God-figure and stifling mother in *Pierre*.

[2] *Mardi*, I, 43.

[3] *Ibid*., p. 47.

> Yet, with deference, I deny that my old uncle Johnson really believed in the sentiment ascribed to him. Love a hater, indeed! Who smacks his lips over gall? Now hate is a thankless thing. So, let us only hate hatred; and once give love play, we will fall in love with a unicorn. Ah! the easiest way is the best; and to hate, a man must work hard. Love is a delight; but hate a torment. And haters are thumbscrews, Scotch boots, and Spanish inquisitions to themselves. In five words -- would they were a Siamese diphthong -- he who hates is a fool.[1]

Significantly, this passage, which parallels Melville's main criticism of Ahab in Moby-Dick, is almost immediately qualified: "But of all sharks, save me from the ghastly White Shark. For though we should hate naught, yet some dislikes are spontaneous; and disliking is not hating. And never yet could I bring myself to be loving, or even sociable, with a White Shark."[2] Though Ishmael can be more tolerant of "horrors" than the narrator of Mardi, we find in both men an instinctive fear of the ultimate depths of the physical universe, be they mindless or malign. And though these mysteries are not explored further in Mardi, Melville has evinced curiosity concerning their significance. "Oh, believe me, God's creatures fighting, fin for fin, a thousand miles from land, and with the round horizon for an arena, is no ignoble subject for a masterpiece."[3] The "round horizon" will appear again in Moby-Dick, where men are compared to sharks and where the probings into the universe and into the hearts of men become identical operations.

In Chapter 19, the narrator and Jarl exchange the isolation of the sea for the companionship of two islanders, and Mardi turns toward its characteristic examination of the manners and morals of mankind. The adventures of Samoa and Annatoo aboard the "Parki" are far less important for the themes of Mardi than is their relationship with each other; for in the description of their marriage Melville gives us a foreshadowing on a grosser level of Taji's disastrous union with Yillah. Having married Annatoo after her "first virgin bloom had departed,"[1] Samoa finds himself chained to a most exasperating and often dangerous animal. Samoa's amputation of his arm, which makes the narrator think of him as "but a large fragment of a man, not a man complete,"[2] symbolizes his self-emasculation through marriage to the dominating Annatoo. And the narrator's negative reaction to Annatoo, as powerful as his immediate attraction to Yillah, hints at why he goes to such lengths to rescue the maiden. While Yillah is beautiful and delicate, Annatoo, "being sinewy of limb, and neither young, comely, nor amiable, was exceedingly distasteful in my eyes."[3] While Yillah's sweet innocence represents all that is good in human life, Annatoo's perversity manifests the irrational evil which at times besets mankind:

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[1] Mardi, I, 47-48. [2] Ibid., p. 48. [3] Ibid., p. 49.

> Now, here were four human beings shut up in this little oaken craft, and, for the time being, their interests the same. What sane mortal, then, would forever by committing thefts, without rhyme or reason. It was like stealing silver from one pocket and decanting it into the other. And what might it not lead to in the end?[4]

Whereas to the narrator Yillah is Eve in Paradise, Annatoo is "like a garter-snake under a stone."[5] Almost immediately after Annatoo is swallowed by a whirlpool, Aleema and his sons appear with a maiden also doomed to die in a vortex. The contrast between the two women is readily apparent, but is it as great as it first seems? The answer to this question may help to clarify the admittedly vague symbolism behind the myth of Yillah and her violent rescue by the narrator.

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[1] Mardi, I, 78-79. [2] Ibid., p. 89. [3] Ibid., p. 102.

[4] Ibid., p. 132. [5] Ibid., p. 117.

It seems strange that so soon after his marriage Melville would attack wedded life as severely as he does in the portrayal of Samoa and Annatoo. Samoa, he says, "meditated suicide -- I would have said, wedlock."[1] Even kind, sweet Lizzie could not have missed the point of such a comment as she labored at copying the manuscript of Mardi. All one can imagine is that she and Herman had many a good laugh over his masculine playfulness. But perhaps Melville's mind was working in directions other than those of the stereotyped male complaint. Perhaps the character of Yillah, suggested to Melville by his wife and sister, embodied a deeply felt reaction on his part to married life.

Both Melville and Hawthorne, though clearly attracted to dark, passionate female characters, normally followed the Romance tradition of portraying their heroines as blonde, delicate creatures unfamiliar with the depths of physical desire. Hawthorne, at least at times, clearly identified his innocent heroines with his wife. Yet it is Melville who expresses so strongly in Pierre the idea that sexual relations after marriage are somehow a sacrilegious violation of an angelic being. We need not identify completely Pierre's romanticized notion of love with Melville's own attitude before his marriage, nor need we agree completely with Leslie Fiedler's contention that sex is the American male's inevitable Waterloo,[2] in order to speculate that Melville may have experienced some feelings of guilt and repulsion toward sexual relations with his wife. Indeed in Mardi itself we find Babbalanja explaining that plants "make love and multiply; but excel us in all amorous enticements, wooing and winning by soft pollens and essences."[1] Yet such an assumption is important only as a possible starting point for Melville's allegorical portrayal of Yillah; for within the book itself there is ample evidence to confirm the thesis that the relationship of Taji and Yillah is the end of innocence for each.

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[1] Mardi, I, 79.

[2] I must credit Mr. Fiedler, however, with suggesting this interpretation: "Nothing less than the whole sentimental myth of redemption through marriage is challenged by Melville's suggestion that the milk-white bride is corrupted by the consummation of marriage." Love and Death, p. 297. It is also supported (exclusive of the idea that Taji hoped to find salvation in primal innocence with Yillah) by Newton Arvin, Herman Melville, pp. 95-96.

The narrator involves himself in guilt before he ever sees Yillah. Having met and boarded the barge of Aleema and his sons, he is moved by simple curiosity to discover what is hidden in the tent. But when he learns that a "beautiful maiden" is about to be sacrificed, his emotion changes from curiosity to violent passion. "Now, hearing of the maiden, I waited for no more. Need I add, how stirred was my soul toward this invisible victim; and how hotly I swore, that precious blood of hers should never smoke upon an altar."[2] Though "no gentle signal of distress had been waved . . . from the tent,"[3] and though he "desired no shedding of blood,"[4] the narrator arms himself and his comrades and deliberately defies Aleema's command to leave the barge or die. In an instant he recognizes both his situation and his motive. "Fifteen to three. Madness to gainsay his mandate. Yet a beautiful maiden was at stake."[5] The narrator has made violence almost inevitable, and he refuses even to try to avoid its approach. Thus he wins Yillah by a murder. We have been prepared for the possibility of such a passionate attraction to a beautiful woman by the narrator's clearly expressed repugnance to Annatoo, but even he is aghast at the lengths to which he goes to satisfy his impulse.

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[1] Mardi, II, 219. [2] Mardi, I, 152. [3] Ibid.

[4] Ibid. [5] Ibid., p. 154.

> As I gazed at this sight, what iron mace fell on my soul; what curse rang sharp in my ear! It was I, who was the author of the deed that caused the shrill wails that I heard. By this hand, the dead man had died. Remorse smote me hard; and like lightning I asked myself, whether the death-deed I had done was sprung of a virtuous motive, the rescuing a captive from thrall; or whether beneath that pretence, I had engaged in this fatal affray for some other, and selfish purpose; the companionship of a beautiful maid. But throttling the thought, I swore to be gay. Am I not rescuing the maiden? Let them go down who withstand me.[1]

Once again, as in his desertion of the Arcturion, the narrator has embarked upon an important episode of his life sullied by guilt.

Having temporarily shaken off his feelings of remorse, the narrator enters the tent of his prize. But at this point, I would suggest, an important change takes place in his attraction to Yillah; for he discovers before him not only a beautiful woman but seemingly an embodiment of perfect innocence. Though apparently a native girl, she is as fair as the fairest Hawthorne heroine. The rose-colored pearl that she wears, representative of her heavenly origin, is also a symbol of her unblemished purity. Her relation of the history of her early years not only establishes her mythic inviolability but reveals that Aleema had taken care that her carnal passions would be neither aroused nor satisfied. The narrator's ardor is redoubled upon discovering this daughter of innocence; but, instead of treating her as a barbarian conqueror would, he decides that he must win her heart gently. And as he carries out this plan, it becomes evident that his fascination with Yillah is no longer merely physical. He hopes to find in her something which transcends the orthodox idea of salvation. He hopes to establish, with her, a life of primal purity.

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[1] Mardi, I, 156-157.

First of all, he feels, he must rid her of the disturbing myths with which Aleema has surrounded her. What he does in fact is to draw himself into the myths to the extent that the boundaries of "fact" and "fancy" become blurred for both of them. Instead of convincing Yillah that she is human (a fact which he does not fully wish to believe himself), the narrator manages to half-convince himself that he is divine. He tells Yillah that he played with her in Oroolia.[1] This fiction is successful with the girl: "Sunk the ghost of Aleema: Sweet Yillah was mine!"[2] It is even more successful with the narrator. His assumption of the identity of the demi-god Taji at Odo is an eminently practical deceit; but it leads Taji to follow in the footsteps of Media, a man who fools himself into thinking that he is immune to the moral, mental, and physical agony of mankind.

Taji almost succeeds in creating an Eden from his communion with the fragile innocence of Yillah. Even before they reach land he has woven around them a barrier between their love and the world.

> Besides, what cared I now for the green groves and bright shore? Was not Yillah my shore and my grove? my meadow, my mead, my soft shady vine, and my arbour? Of all things desirable and delightful, the full-plumed sheaf, and my own right arm the band? Enough: no shore for me yet.[3]

Neither the land nor the limitations of human life can be avoided forever; but even after reaching Odo, Taji manages to isolate Yillah and himself on an island retreat. It is here that he comes closest to attaining his dream:

> But day by day, did her spell weave round me its magic, and all the hidden things of her being grew more lovely and strange. Did I commune with a spirit? Often I thought that Paradise had overtaken me on earth, and that Yillah was verily an angel, and hence the mysteries that hallowed her.[4]

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[1] _Mardi_, I, 165-166. [2] _Ibid_., p. 166. [3] _Ibid_., p. 168.

[4] _Ibid_., p. 226.

The dream, of course, is doomed. Taji has sown the seeds of its destruction by his misdeeds, particularly by his lies to Yillah concerning himself and the fate of Aleema and by his murder of the priest. At the moment of his departure from the barge with the girl, Taji entertains doubts of his motives similar to Pierre's self-questionings:

> But though [Aleema] had sunk in the deep, his ghost sunk not in the deep waters of my soul. However in exultations its surface foamed up, at bottom guilt brooded. Sifted out, my motives to this enterprise justified not the mad deed, which, in a moment of rage, I had done: though, those motives had been covered with a gracious pretence; concealing myself from myself. But I beat down the thought.[1]

But he cannot lie often enough, cannot change his identity radically enough to escape what he has done. The three avengers who follow Taji through Mardi are not merely the proddings of his conscience; they are representatives of their father, of religion. Insistently they repeat, as religion has done for centuries, a lesson that haunted Melville: fallible, limited man cannot create an earthly paradise.

Yillah also helps to destroy the possibility of Taji's self-created Eden. In her nature is embodied a duality fatal to life in the "enviable Isles" of Taji's dream. On the one hand she is indeed an angel, a being created in the image of God; unfortunately her Creator is inaccessible, lost in the mists of legend and mystery. On the other hand Yillah is a woman, a human being whose nature is inevitably prey to corruption of one sort or another. Taji recognizes but chooses to ignore this contradiction in his beloved, and by doing so he leaves himself and her unprepared for what is to come. He realizes that she must be rid of the beliefs which the priests of the area have foisted upon her and others: "Thus wrought upon, their pupils almost lose their humanity in the constant indulgence of seraphic imaginings."[1] What he doesn't see is that the loss of "seraphic imaginings" is but a prelude to the rude shock of the world's evil upon a young mind and heart.

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[1] Mardi, I, 162.

Yillah is going to her death at the hands of Aleema because she knows nothing of mortal corruption in any of its forms. Taji rescues her from the priest, whose religion assumes that death is the only alternative to eventual loss of innocence; but he snatches her from one vortex merely to lead her toward the verge of another. He wants to bring her, like Thel, from the world of pure spirit into the world of flesh. Yillah does not flee in terror from this prospect, as does Thel. Ironically Taji understands better than she does the dangers involved in the metamorphosis he proposes. Just as he happily considers the possibility of drifting serenely with her, cut off from all danger, "strange Yillah gazed down in the sea, and would fain have had me plunge into it with her, to rove through its depths. But I started dismayed; in fancy, I saw the stark body of the priest drifting by. Again that phantom obtruded; again guilt laid his red hand on my soul."[2] Taji sees death and corruption in the sea, but Yillah, awakened yet still innocent, longs to plunge into her newly-found life. In her confused way, however, it is Yillah who sees that Taji's touch, even were it not bloodstained, must work dramatic changes in her being. As they sail along she remembers the bird which Aleema had said was the soul of a maiden from Oroolia: " . . . Yillah, looking earnestly in its eyes, saw strange faces there; and said to herself as she gazed -- 'These are two souls, not one.'"[3]

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[1] _Mardi_, I, 161. [2] _Ibid_., p. 168. [3] _Ibid_., p. 182.

In Taji's eyes also she sees "some upturned faces."[1] Aware of a basic disunity in her nature, Yillah begins to sense a struggle within her, a struggle which will suck her into an inescapable vortex. She tells Taji "that the whirlpool on the coast of Tedaidee prefigured her fate; that in the waters she saw lustrous eyes, and beckoning phantoms, and strange shapes smoothing her a couch among the mosses."[2]

Taji, however, has deceived himself into believing that one part of Yillah's nature is all of it. Melville is careful to hint at a strange element in Yillah's background. She seems to start at hearing the narrator's English language, and her light skin and hair are a mystery. But when Taji discovers what the reader must have long ago guessed -- that Yillah is a white woman, not a Polynesian -- he seems strangely horrified: "Oh, Yillah! too late, too late have I learned what thou art!"[3] Why is Taji so disturbed? Because, I think, he has fallen into a trap which Melville struggled all his life to avoid. Taji has accepted as fact the myth of the unspoiled savage; he has actually begun to believe Yillah's story that she came uncorrupted from the hand of her Creator in Oroolia. Thus Taji's shocked recognition of Yillah's real origins becomes a perfect example of the confusing mixture of straight narrative, allegory, and symbol which characterizes Mardi.

On the narrative level, Taji is appalled by his discovery because he had considered Yillah to be a pure specimen of unspoiled "natural man," a being who, instead of being dragged into the spiritual morass of the world, would lift him as Beatrice lifted Dante to an existence of primal innocence. But at the moment of Taji's recognition, Yillah ceases to be the figure from Spenserian allegory that Melville had created her to be and Taji thought her to be. Though she had already been corrupted on the narrative level, she could up to this point have been the representative of elusive innocence; but now she is proven never to have been even allegorically innocent. The pristine character suggested to Melville in his original work on the book has become something else in his hands, and Melville has discovered that he had misunderstood her from the beginning. On the narrative level so has Taji. Abstracting from the real woman before him, in much the same way as the adherents of the courtly love tradition, he has transformed her in his mind into a living allegorical figure, a creature with the actual powers of the virtue that she represents. Melville, to his credit and to Mardi's detriment, shifts his technique in accordance with his new understanding of Yillah's nature. He attempts -- and fails -- to achieve in her the fusion between the world of experience and the world of imagination necessary for the creation of a self-perpetuating symbol. Taji, however, makes no such adjustment. To him, Yillah remains the personification of innocence to the end of the book. His willingness to commit suicide in order to pursue Yillah is determined, I think, not by despair at finding all innocence gone from the world but by his refusal to accept the truth at the base of Hautia's temptations. He cannot believe that Yillah has never been completely pure, that from the start she was not what he thought her to be.

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[1] Mardi, I, 177. [2] Ibid., p. 185. [3] Ibid., p. 358.

But stubborn as he is, Taji is finally awakened from his dream of an already achieved paradise by the disappearance of Yillah. And so, deprived of the moral and metaphysical stability for which he had hoped, he begins his quest through Mardi, the quest for innocence. But even at this point in his career, could Melville have believed it possible for man to return to the simplicity of primal innocence while in this world? I think not; and yet it was through his growing interest in the implications of the fanciful

Yillah that Melville recognized a problem with which he was to struggle, at times with frightening intensity, for the rest of his life. Melville realized, as does Taji, that if a Yillah were possible she would be a completely stable (because simple) element in a world of endless change. But Melville saw, as Taji does not, that total simplicity, total changelessness is impossible in a world of time: "For to make an eternity, we must build with eternities . . . . And [man's] whole mortal life brings not his immortal soul to maturity; nor will all eternity perfect him."[1] It is inevitable (and perhaps desirable) that man perpetually re-enact the Original Sin, that he eat of the Tree of Knowledge. But once he does so, his being is fragmented, prey to a complex of conflicting needs and desires. No longer in simple harmony with Nature, rational man must learn somehow to live simultaneously in the world of mind and the world of physical experience. If out of this duality he can create a new whole, a new unity, then he has improved his lot tremendously over that of the naive innocent, the "natural man." If, however, man cannot escape from the chaos of a fragmented world and a fragmented self, then he has lost with the acquisition of freedom of will and thought something of incalculable value.

Faced with this situation, the civilized man of Melville's time had three choices. He could become discouraged with the results of "rational" thought throughout the centuries and attempt to become a primitive (or at least to prove that the "unspoiled savage" is a living example of man's original innocence). He could accept the Western assumption that it is possible to move forward in a rational[2] way toward knowledge of a permanent order in the universe. In other words, he could attempt to participate in the Hegelian process of transforming what had originally been a unified totality of truth into a new whole by a process of rational ordering. Or, finally, he could become a nihilist, denying the possibility of bringing any order to the chaos within and outside of himself. Despite his wistful memories of Polynesia, Melville was never able to believe that the savage was free from corruption or even that civilized man could regain the primitive state. Nihilism was a world-view which he struggled desperately (and perhaps at times unsuccessfully) to avoid. Thus he was left with only one intellectual road to pursue.

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[1] Mardi, I, 266, 268.

[2] I use this term to indicate any deliberate, controlled, at least partially abstract thought process, be it philosophical, artistic, historical or mathematical in nature.

In Moby-Dick Melville would make an attempt to create order out of man's essential nature, without necessarily being able to understand it. In Pierre he would entertain doubts about the existence of a consistent identity, knowable or not. But in Mardi, at least for the sake of argument, he accepted the traditional Western view that, for man to find meaning, he must discover the stable order from which he comes and within which he acts: "Thus deeper and deeper into Time's endless tunnel, does the winged soul, like a night-hawk, wend her wild way; and finds eternities before and behind; and her last limit is her everlasting beginning."[1] Having found this order, he need only strive to unite himself with it as closely as possible to live a life of the fullest reality. The sources of the eternal order which Melville found available to him were knowledge of God, knowledge of the Universe, knowledge of self, or any combination of these three. Religion, science, philosophy, history, psychology, politics -- these represent the efforts of man to establish a communion with a world system, and these are the human activities examined and carried out in Mardi. Viewed in these terms, it is obvious that the allegorical weakness of Mardi is not its only problem. The scope of the novel is so broad that at times the book approaches and even passes the limits of total artistic collapse.

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[1] Mardi, I, 268-269.

Excited by a new insight into man's life, Melville tried to examine it from all sides at once. The final product of his analysis is less a novel or an allegory than the mist at the bottom of an intellectual waterfall. But within the "fogs" of Mardi there is some order to be discovered. The conversations of the questers, particularly the monologues of Babbalanja, set the limits and tenor of the examination of man and his world and help to reflect Melville's conflicting ideas. Babbalanja, Mohi, and Yoomy represent three of man's primary attitudes toward his situation -- that of the philosopher, the historian, and the poet. The people they meet on the quest are either examples of man's condition, as described primarily by Babbalanja, or representatives of the manifold ways in which men live. Finally, the institutions which Taji and his companions examine are man's highest efforts to pattern his life upon an allegedly stable order. Thus the dramatic conclusion of Taji's search for primal innocence comes after a full survey of the alternatives to his forlorn hope of finding Yillah.

The context within which that search is undertaken is no less than the total situation of man -- a subject explored intensely, if not always profoundly, by Babbalanja. Man is an anomaly in creation, a mixture bizarre even in his own view:

> "Alas," cried Babbalanja, "do the fairies then wait on repletion? Do our dreams come from below, and not from the skies? Are we angels, or dogs? Oh, man, man, man! thou art harder to solve than the Integral Calculus -- yet plain as a primer; harder to find than the philosopher's stone -- yet ever at hand; a more cunning compound than an alchemist's -- yet a hundredweight of flesh to a pennyweight of spirit; soul and body glued together, firm as atom

> to atom, seamless as the vestment without joint, warp or woof -- yet divided as by a river, spirit from flesh; growing both ways, like a tree, and dropping thy topmost branches to earth, like thy beard or a banian! -- I give thee up, oh man! thou art twain -- yet indivisible; all things -- yet a poor unit at best."[1]

Burdened with this strange nature, man can move toward either of the extremes. Melville was too unnerved by primitive passions and too aware of the dangers of idealism (from "Plato's honey head" to "Muggletonian Scots and Yankees") to support either the primitivist or the idealist philosophy. But to hang suspended between two worlds, to be expected to function in both at once, is by no means an unmixed blessing. Though man's body and his mind or soul often conflict with one another, neither can exist without the other: "Without bodies, my lord, we Mardians would be minus our strongest motive passions, those which, in some way or other, root under our every action. Hence, without bodies, we must be something else than we essentially are."[2] And the free will which man has attained by his disharmony with unthinking Nature is limited by his still close ties with that same Nature:

> Many a time have I willed to do one thing, and another has been done . . . . And though some adults would seem to refer all their actions to [a] moral sense, yet, in reality, it is not so; for, dominant in them, their moral sense bridles their instinctive passions; wherefore, they do not govern themselves, but are governed by their very natures . . . . My lord, it is easier for some men to be saints, than for others not to be sinners.[3]

So radical is this disunity within man that he cannot even perceive a solid personal identity:

> My lord, -- for the present putting Azzageddi entirely aside, -- though I have now been upon terms of close companionship with myself for nigh five hundred moons, I have not yet been able to decide who or what I am. To you, perhaps, I seem Babbalanja; but to myself, I seem not myself. All I am sure of is a sort of prickly sensation all over me, which they call life . . . . [4]

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[1] _Mardi_, II, 131. [2] _Ibid_., p. 215. [3] _Ibid_., pp. 155-156.

[4] _Ibid_., p. 157.

Man does seem to be possessed of devils, as Babbalanja speculates. Prey to a multitude of desires, each man has at least one "Azzageddi." Some have several.

Thus man's nature -- if chaos threatening constantly to become unbridled, total, can be called a "nature" -- is potentially destructive of any ethical or moral system. Peepi, legendary heir to the souls of all his ancestors, is a type of what all men could become: "Thus subject to contrary impulses, over which he had not the faintest control, Peepi was plainly denuded of all moral obligation to virtue. He was no more a free agent, than the heart which beat in his bosom." But, as Babbalanja says, when the legislators "vowed by statute, that Peepi could do no wrong, they assuredly did violence to the truth; besides, making a sad blunder in their logic. For far from possessing an absolute aversion to evil, by his very nature it was the hardest thing in the world for Peepi to do right."[1] There may be a "someone" inside each man, but he can neither be sure of its existence nor truly understand it:

> He is locked up in me. In a mask, he dodges me. He prowls about in me, hither and thither; he peers, and I stare. This is he who talks in my sleep, revealing my secrets; and takes me to unheard of realms, beyond the skies of Mardi. So present is he always, that I seem not so much to live of myself, as to be a mere apprehension of the unaccountable being that is in me. Yet all the time this being is I, myself.[2]

Thus the folly of the hedonist Borabolla, the wealthy snobs of Pimminee, the gold-seekers of Vivenza, or even the cheerfully indifferent pseudo-god Media -- all of whom assume a stable human nature and a certain knowledge of its precise needs.

But man's deep-seated disunity does more than induce in him a state of perpetual civil war -- it both makes him mortal and leaves him unsure of the exact nature of his mortality. "Nay, nay, death is life's last despair. Hard and horrible is it to die."[1] Babbalanja's judgment reflects quite accurately the situation of man as he is portrayed in Mardi. Each person must live his life faced with the fact that, inevitably, his existence as he knows it will end and with the possibility that his very being may be extinguished. This final prospect, Melville speculates, is abhorrent to all life:

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[1] Mardi, I, 238. [2] Mardi, II, 157.

> For, does it not appear a little unreasonable to imagine, that there is any creature, fish, flesh, or fowl, so little in love with life, as not to cherish hopes of a future state? Why does man believe in it? One reason, reckoned cogent, is, that he desires it.[2]

Desire it he does; and at various times the voyagers in Mardi speculate about the possible fulfillment of his desires. Foreshadowing in his last sentence one of the themes of Moby-Dick, Babbalanja sees no hope in one side of man's mixed nature: "All vanity, vanity, Yoomy, to seek in nature for positive warranty to these aspirations of ours. Through all her provinces, nature seems to promise immortality to life, but destruction to beings. Or, as old Bardianna has it, if not against us, nature is not for us."[3] Having beaten down his own desire to believe in immortality (a mental vigor which most Victorians chose not to strive for), the philosopher finds that all the evidence seems to deny immortality:

> What ho, hot heart of mine: to beat thus lustily awhile, to feel in the red rushing blood, and then be ashes, -- can this be so? But peace, peace, thou liar in me, telling me I am immortal -- shall I not be as these bones? To come to this! . . . . Nothing abideth; the river of yesterday floweth not to-day; the sun's rising is a setting; living is dying; the very mountains melt; and all revolve: -- systems and asteroids; the sun wheels through the zodiac, and the zodiac is a revolution. Ah gods! in all this universal stir, am I to prove one stable thing?[4]

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[1] Mardi, II, 357. [2] Mardi, I, 335. [3] Ibid., p. 244.

[4] Ibid., p. 277.

Religious faith, as Melville indicates in the story of a mother's grief for her dead son (Chapter 98), is not sufficient to calm our fears. Mardi's final answer to the problem of death seems to rest, allegorically, in the tale of Uhia, a chief who eschewed the love of women in order to strengthen himself for an impossibly difficult task:

> Now, informed of all this, said Babbalanja to Media, "My lord, if the continual looking-forward to something greater, be better than an acquiescence in things present; then, wild as it is, this belief of Uhia's he should hug to his heart, as erewhile his wives. But my lord, this faith it is, that robs his days of peace; his nights of sweet unconsciousness."[1]

But even this lesson is an evasion rather than a solution. The fact remains that man must carry on his search for meaning and stability without knowing if he has any real basis in himself from which to proceed and without assurance that there is anything of permanence in this world. The search must be made, however; for, unless man can discover and unite himself with some eternal order within or outside of himself, he will remain like the king Donjolalo, imprisoned within his own nature, "vacillating between virtue and vice; to neither constant, and upbraided by both; his mind . . . continually passing and repassing between opposite extremes."[2]

The concept "Truth," the rationally apprehended meaning of the universe, or even of part of it, receives much of the voyagers' attention as they search, ostensibly, for a principle which may make discursive rationality unnecessary. To be tested in the isles of Mardi are both the belief of the eighteenth century rationalist that the secret springs of the universe were ultimately discoverable and the hope of the Enlightenment idealist that through his knowledge man could attain moral and intellectual perfection.

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[1] Mardi, I, 319-320. [2] Ibid., p. 262.

Babbalanja defends the rational pursuit of truth to Yoomy, who asks whether men are gods that they should discuss profound questions of speculative theology and philosophy:

> "No, minstrel," said Babbalanja; "and no need have the great gods to discourse of things perfectly comprehended by them, and by themselves ordained. But you and I, Yoomy, are men, and not gods; hence is it for us, and not for them, to take these things for our themes. Nor is there any impiety in the right use of our reason, whatever the issue. Smote with superstition, shall we let it wither and die out, a dead limb to a live trunk, as the mad devotee's arm held up motionless for years? Or shall we employ it but for a paw, to help us to our bodily needs, as the brutes use their instinct?"[1]

Melville, however, undermines the possibility of man's attaining permanent truth by his "mere unaided reason." Media contends in Chapter 60 that one man can judge as well as twelve or twelve hundred, but he unwittingly establishes the reverse as well -- that one man is no more fit to make a judgment upon others than is a mob. At the beginning of this same chapter Melville makes it clear that Media, despite his pretense to the haughty, indifferent status of a demigod, is endowed with no more wisdom than any other man. The chapter opens with a lavish, overwrought description of the glory of a king enthroned, brought to a simple anti-climax: "A king on his throne! After all, but a gentleman seated. And thus sat the good lord, King Media."[2]

Soon after the voyage begins, the conflicting claims of Yoomy and Mohi to the possession of truth are elicited in a heated exchange between the two. Yoomy, espousing the aesthetic theory that "Beauty is truth, truth beauty," claims that his creations have "a shapeliness and a unity" while Mohi's supposedly accurate chronicles are composed of "mangled realities."[3] Mohi in his turn asserts that, because Yoomy has "invented," he "has not spoken the truth."[1] Without attributing any special powers to art, Babbalanja attempts to arbitrate:

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[1] _Mardi_, II, 122-123.

[2] _Mardi_, I, 213.

[3] _Ibid_., p. 324.

> And I, Babbalanja, assert, that what are vulgarly called fictions are as much realities as the gross mattock of Dididi, the digger of trenches; for things visible are but conceits of the eye: things imaginative, conceits of the fancy. If duped by one, we are equally duped by the other.[2]

Angered, Mohi asks the philosopher to define truth: "The old interrogatory; did they not ask it when the world began? But ask it no more. As old Bardianna hath it, that question is more final than any answer."[3]

Not hopeful words from the impassioned defender of rational inquiry, but not surprising ones either. Babbalanja is skeptical enough to be doubtful of his own powers. Again and again he is forced to admit in anguish that he has little hope of finding any permanent truth. His fears are confirmed fully in the course of the book. Logic and science, gods of the Enlightenment, are ridiculed. Babbalanja, who has dabbled in the abstractions of logic, is horrified to meet the renowned wise man Doxodox. He reacts violently to the logician's "Ogdoads" and "dicibles":

> Outrageous imposter! fool, dotard, oaf! Did he think to bejuggle me with his preposterous gibberish? And is this shallow phraseman the renowned Doxodox whom I have been taught so highly to reverence? Alas, alas -- Odonphi there is none![4]

Again it is Babbalanja, this time with malice aforethought, who exposes the folly of "objective," "precise" science as he explains two outlandish theories of the creation of the world:

> "Mohi tells us that Mardi was made in six days; but you, Babbalanja, have built it up from the bottom in less than six minutes."
> "Nothing for us geologists, my lord. At a word we turn you out whole systems, suns, satellites, and asteroids included. Why, my

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[1] _Mardi_, I, 329. [2] _Ibid_. [3] _Ibid_.

[4] _Mardi_, II, 286.

> good lord, my friend Annonimo is laying out a new Milky Way, to intersect with the old one, and facilitate cross-cuts among the comets."[1]

Another dream of the Enlightenment was widespread political reform based on a knowledge of man's essential nature, and Melville's allegorical satire of the contemporary political situation is therefore germane to his examination of the fruits of man's rational attempt to improve his lot. He attacks the policies of imperialistic Dominora (England) and the rest of western Europe, but the burden of his criticism falls on liberal democratic reformers. Melville's hope and doubt about the future of America are perfectly expressed in his chapters on Vivenza, and both were intimately bound to his fear that the democrat's trust in human nature was not justified by known facts:

> It is not unknown, sovereign kings! that in these boisterous days, the lessons of history are almost discarded, as superseded by present experiences. And that while all Mardi's present has grown out of its past, it is becoming obsolete to refer to what has been. Yet, peradventure, the past is an apostle.[2]

On the one hand, Melville could not help thinking that a nation founded on principles which so firmly recognized the dignity of man might be the one palpable hope for mankind's future. On the other hand, he saw that Americans had become complacent, had allowed a system of slavery to flourish in their midst, had become as warlike and imperialistic as the English. Trusting too much in the resources of their untapped West and in their own institutions, Melville says, the men of America think themselves kings. He suggests, however, that by their unthinking submission to the blandishments of politicians they have lost much of their alleged freedom: "Civilisation has not ever been the brother of equality. Freedom was born among the wild eyries in the mountains; and barbarous tribes have sheltered under her wings, when the enlightened people of the plain have nestled under different pinions."[1] The imagery of this passage indicates, moreover, that Melville was concerned with more than good government in his examination of Vivenza. In Pierre the plains are associated with the complacent naiveté of Lucy while the mountains represent the gloomy recesses of Isabel's nature. And in this statement as well as in the rest of the Vivenza section Melville indicates quite clearly that, just as the qualities of Isabel are both liberating and destructive, the freedom in the New World can lead either to human progress or to triumphs of unfettered evil: "And though all evils may be assuaged; all evils cannot be done away. For evil is the chronic malady of the universe; and checked in one place, breaks forth in another."[2] Here again we return to what will be a growing concern in Melville's writing. The Vivenzans' boast that they are kingless may prove an empty one; instead they may have made themselves slaves to the powerful and as yet unknown evil in their hearts. Thus the optimism of "whistling Jonathan" (as he calls America in Clarel, II, i, 36-41) is quite possibly unfounded and therefore more dangerous than useful to man's constant search for moral and intellectual stability.

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[1] _Mardi_, II, 113. [2] _Ibid_., p. 238.

I do not mean to suggest here that at this time Melville doubted the possibility of man's achieving any real understanding of himself and his world. In fact he may even have thought that some progress was evident in certain spheres of human activity. But at the same time he demonstrates in Mardi a distinct awareness that much of man's knowledge is useless to him. In the researches of Oh-Oh the antiquary Melville satirizes the barren academic pursuit of "facts," but Oh-Oh's experiments with the telescope have not been as fatuous as the rest of his work. And yet to what purpose?

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[1] Mardi, II, 242. [2] Ibid., p. 244.

> "Hast yet brought your microscope to bear upon a downy peach, or a rosy cheek?"
> "I have," said Oh-Oh, mournfully; "and from the moment I so did, I have had no heart to eat a peach, or salute a cheek."
> "Then dash your lens!" cried Media.
> "Well said, my lord. For all the eyes we get beyond our own but minister to infelicity. The microscope disgusts us with our Mardi; and the telescope sets us longing for some other world."[1]

Even more important is Melville's treatment of Seneca in Mardi. Babbalanja discovers a manuscript of a philosopher who lived before Alma and who, without promising a reward in afterlife, propounded a highly moral human life similar to that outlined by Alma. As enthralled as Babbalanja is by this ancient, he replies to Media, who asks whether the philosopher's writings satisfy him, that they do not:

> My lord, you drive me home. I am not content. The mystery of mysteries is still a mystery. How this author came to be so wise, perplexes me. How he led the life he did, confounds me. Oh, my lord, I am in darkness, and no broad blaze comes down to flood me. The rays that come to me are but faint cross lights, mazing the obscurity wherein I live. And after all, excellent as it is, I can be no gainer by this book.[2]

Babbalanja indicates here that this ancient philosophy is not universal, that it is sufficient for its founder only, and that it consists of exhortation to the will, not the intellect. Moreover, even Babbalanja's belief that the philosopher (modeled after Seneca) actually lived out his philosophy is ironically undercut by Melville's commentary on Seneca himself in 1848:

> It is indeed undeniable, that in Seneca & other of the old philosophers, we meet with maxims of actual life, & lessons of practical wisdom which not only equal but exceed anything in the Scriptures. -- But behold the force of example, & its omnipotence over mere precepts however lofty. Seneca's life belied his philosophy; But that of Christ went beyond his own teachings.[3]

But perhaps Seneca is not too much to blame; for as Babbalanja says, after noting the complexity of the moral issue over slavery in the United States, "For the righteous to suppress an evil is sometimes harder than for others to uphold it."[1] Even knowledge of what is right may be useless to man.

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[1] Mardi, II, 71. [2] Ibid., p. 80. [3] Leyda, I, 285.

Thus the search for salvation through knowledge in _Mardi_ can only be reckoned a failure; and haughty Media's comment must stand as the book's final judgment on man's rational pursuits:

> Furthermore, Babbalanja, on this head, final, last thoughts you mortals have none; nor can have; and, at bottom, your own fleeting fancies are too often secrets to yourselves; and sooner may you get another's secret, than your own. Thus with the wisest of you all; you are ever unfixed. Do you show a tropical calm without? then, be sure a thousand contrary currents whirl and eddy within. The free, airy robe of your philosophy is but a dream, which seems true while it lasts; but waking again into the orthodox world, straightway you resume the old habit. And though in your dreams you may hie to the uttermost Orient, yet all the while you abide where you are. Babbalanja, you mortals dwell in Mardi, and it is impossible to get elsewhere.[2]

It is impossible to get elsewhere. In an effort to do precisely this, to escape from a world of flux to one of stasis, Melville turns inevitably to religion. In fact it is my contention that Melville has never been as far away from religion as the sections of _Mardi_ which I have been discussing might suggest. In the first place, as I tried to show in my first chapter, the concepts "Truth" and "God" were nearly if not completely identical for Melville. Rather than agreeing with Lawrance Thompson that Melville saw God primarily as the source of good and evil, I would suggest that Melville's God was the source of eternal _meaning_. Melville himself expresses this idea in _Mardi_: "God is my lord; and though many satellites revolve around me, I and all mine revolve round the great central Truth, sunlike, fixed and luminous forever in the foundationless firmament."[3] Those critics, including Mr. Thompson, who identify him with Ahab, consider Melville to be more disturbed by physical evil (i.e., Ahab's loss of his leg) than he really is. For example, in Redburn Melville is appalled not so much at the sufferings of the starving woman as at the moral degradation of a society that could bring about such a tragedy and then steadfastly refuse to avert it (at times on "moral" grounds). Thus the evil he found in creation demonstrated to Melville that the whole world was out of joint; but what drove him to despair was that the brutal forces of mindless Nature were reflected deep in the soul of "rational" man. Melville's search for knowledge, therefore, was one for a permanent platform from which to understand and control the self-destructive elements of man's nature.

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[1] _Mardi_, II, 251. [2] _Ibid_., p. 57. [3] _Ibid_., p. 54.

It should now be clear that there is a second connection between religion and Melville's search for truth. That quest was never an end in itself; it was in fact directed toward a morality based on certainty, a code which not only would tell man what to do but would give him the tools with which to do it. In Melville it is easy to pass, as I did in the discussion of Vivenza, from a consideration of whether a man knows what he thinks he knows about himself and his world to a speculation about the extent of his control over the forces deep within him. Knowledge, to Melville, is useful only insofar as it can lead men to realize their human potential more fully, to live a truly moral life, to place themselves solidly in the eternal scheme of things.

It is legitimate to ask at this point whether Melville's constant association of religion with morality was not something more than a mindless reflection of a shallow, moralistic Protestant upbringing. It may have been that in part, but in addition it seems to have been the result of a conviction that real unity with God through faith must include a change in the moral life. For how can a man be in actual communion with the source of order and yet fail to give moral form to the chaos within himself? Melville's demand of religion was not that it make man non-human (as Christian hagiology and some Eastern religions seemed to do) or inhuman (as Melville saw religion do often) but more truly human. Melville did not insist, as many critics assume, that religious men be constantly moral but merely that they desire and attempt to be moral. It is with this goal in mind that he examines religion in Mardi.

As we turn from the subject of rational inquiry to that of faith, Melville gives a definition of the only type of faith he finds even remotely possible:

> But let us hold fast to all we have; and stop all leaks in our faith; lest an opening, but of a hand's breadth, should sink our seventy-fours . . . . Panoplied in all the armour of St. Paul, morion, hauberk, and greaves, let us fight the Turks inch by inch, and yield them naught but our corpse.
>
> But let us not turn round upon friends, confounding them with foes. For dissenters only assent to more than we.[1]

At first it might appear from this that Melville is searching frantically for some sort of belief behind which he can hide from the world, but in fact the faith described is the sternest possible test of a man's character. It recognizes, first of all, that the fight against evil, against the chaos of constant change, will last until death. Secondly, and more importantly, it substitutes for orthodoxy intellectual openness, for moral certainty moral search. As the "wilful boy" in Maramma says: "To believe is a haughty thing; my very doubts humiliate me. I weep and doubt; all Mardi may be right; and I too simple to discern."[2] Here again we have the religious dilemma expressed in nearly Kierkegaardian terms. Man must have faith in a universal God without assuming that his belief sets a pattern for anyone else; he must be morally certain of his own individual acts merely by virtue of his union with God, not with reference to a man-made system of truth.

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[1] Mardi, I, 344. [2] Mardi, II, 20.

Yet this is not the type of faith found by the voyagers. In Mardi men quarrel about a fossilized footprint (the Trinity), arguing vainly whether it is of one foot or three toes.[1] Like the blind men in Babbalanja's parable who search for the main trunk of an ancient banyan tree, each Mardian claims that his religious sect is the "true trunk."[2] Despite their obvious blindness, men use their religion not as a guide but as a vehicle for their mistaken pride:

> The prophet came to dissipate errors, you say; but superadded to many that have survived the past, ten thousand others have originated in various constructions of the principles of Alma himself. The prophet came to do away all gods but one; but since the days of Alma, the idols of Maramma have more than quadrupled. . . . Nay: take from your chronicles, Mohi, the history of those horrors, one way or other, resulting from the doings of Alma's nominal followers, and your chronicles would not so frequently make mention of blood.[3]

Christian countries warp their religion for use as a weapon of conquest in the East:

> "Maramma's priests, thy pious heralds, loud proclaim that of all pagans, Orienda's most resist the truth! -- ay! vain all pious voices, that speak from clouds of war! The march of conquest through wild provinces may be the march of Mind; but not the march of Love."
>
> "Thou, Bello!" cried Yoomy, "wouldst wrest the crook from Alma's hand, and place in it a spear. But vain to make a conqueror of him, who put off the purple when he came to Mardi; and declining gilded mitres, entered the nations meekly on an ass."[4]

And if mankind in the mass fails to follow in actuality what it espouses in theory, what of the individual? The voyagers find, as Melville found in Typee and Omoo, that men twist religion to suit their own purposes. Nulli, the champion of slavery, calls upon religion to witness to the righteousness of his position.[1] Babbalanja asserts that many Christians believe in eternal damnation because it gives them comfort to know that their enemies will be damned; yet despite the belief, "pious patricians" despise the poor whom Alma loved and consigned to heaven and thus "pursue a career, which, according to some theologies, must forever preserve the social distinctions so sedulously maintained in Mardi."[2] Seeing all this -- the inhumanity, the false pride, the hypocrisy of so-called religious men -- Babbalanja expresses a simple philosophy:

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[1] Mardi, II, 111. [2] Ibid, pp. 40-42. [3] Ibid., p. 32.

[4] Ibid., p. 271.

> Let us be content with the theology in the grass and the flower, in seed-time and harvest. Be it enough for us to know that Oro indubitably is. My lord! my lord! sick with the spectacle of the madness of men, and broken with spontaneous doubts, I sometimes see but two things in all Mardi to believe: -- that I myself exist, and that I can most happily, or least miserably exist, by the practice of righteousness. All else is in the clouds; and naught else may I learn, till the firmament by split from horizon to horizon. Yet, alas! too often do I swing from these moorings.[3]

For Melville, too, these basic beliefs were attractive; and yet he, like Babbalanja, could not rest easily in a faith uncorroborated, even in its elementals, by certain knowledge. Melville's Protestant heritage was the same that produced the thought of Kierkegaard. Both men were conditioned by their religious training to desire, to need an unmediated relationship with God. But by the middle of the nineteenth century the gulf between God and man had become an abyss. Faced with a seemingly meaningless world and thus with the necessity of communicating with a God that he could not know, Kierkegaard remained within the Protestant tradition by making an extraordinary act of faith. He would believe in his justification in God, not by means of his confidence (even a wavering one) in the mercy and merits of Christ, but precisely because it was absurd to believe. Melville could never bring himself fully to make such a leap, and in Mardi he examines two alternatives to it -- the widely divergent religions of Maramma and Serenia.

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[1] Mardi, II, 249. [2] Ibid., p. 192. [3] Ibid., pp. 125-126.

Maramma, briefly, represents all formal, institutionalized religion. In its supreme pontiff, rigid orthodoxy, and powerful priesthood, it resembles closely the Roman Catholic Church, the most formal of Christian sects. Yet the abuses discovered in it by the voyagers are those which Melville often condemns in all institutionalized Christianity. Upon landing at Maramma, Taji and his party meet Pani, the priest and guide for the island. His residence is "large and lofty" compared to the surrounding "hovels, with squalid inmates."[1] Though the island is supposed to be open to all visitors, he demands exorbitant fees of those he guides "in the dread name of great Alma, who appointed me a guide."[2] Media and the rest refuse to pay, but Pani assuages his anger at this defiance by stripping a pious beggar of his only possessions while at the same time being showered with gifts from a wealthy matron.

The distance between the Melville of Typee and the Melville of Mardi is evidenced by the fact that his criticism in the latter book is aimed less at the priestly faults I have described than at a deeper failing in the proponents of Christianity -- the dual crime of teaching dostrines degrading to mankind and of teaching at all when they are in fact as ignorant as the rest of men. As many doubts as he had about the soundness of human nature, as much as he scorned those (like Emerson) who he believed refused to see the evil propensities in man, Melville could not accept any religion which took as a major premise man's essential corruption. Melville's answer to such a belief is voiced by the "wilful boy" in reply to the priest's demand that he "bow down, and grind the dust where he stands; and declare himself the vilest creature that crawls":

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[1] Mardi, II, 5.   [2] Ibid., p. 6.

> "I feel nothing in me so utterly vile," said the boy, "and I cringe to none. But I would as lief _adore_ your image, as that in my heart, for both mean the same; but more, how can I? I love great Oro, though I comprehend him not. I marvel at his works, and feel as nothing in his sight; but because he is thus omnipotent, and I a mortal, it follows not that I am vile. Nor so doth he regard me. We do ourselves degrade ourselves, not Oro us. Hath not Oro made me? And therefore am I not worthy to stand erect before him? Oro is almighty, but no despot. I wonder; I hope; I love; I weep; I have in me a feeling nigh to fear, that is not fear; but wholly vile I am not; nor can we love and cringe. But Oro knows my heart, which I cannot speak."
>
> "Impious boy," cried they with the censers, "we will offer thee up before the very image thou contemnest. In the name of Alma, seize him."
>
> And they bore him away unresisting.[1]

For Melville, religious degradation of man in this life was matched by the intolerable doctrine of eternal damnation, a teaching that in fact mocked religion by its implications for the nature of God and the total unimportance of man. Babbalanja says sarcastically that it is natural for the followers of Alma to take consolation in thoughts of hell, "for, according to all one hears in Maramma, the great end of the prophet's mission seems to have been the revealing to us Mardians the existence of horrors, most hard to escape. But better we were all annihilated, than that one man should be damned."[2]

Most tragic in Melville's portrayal of organized Christianity is the fact that none of Maramma's officials is actually certain about the nature of Oro or of man's relationship to him. Even before they land at Maramma, Mohi and Babbalanja notice that the sayings of Alma are used in arguments both for and against the proposition that it is necessary to make pilgrimages to the peak of Ofo (which seems to me to represent the Church, in the broad sense, as distinct from the religion). In fact the top of Ofo (actual communion with God) is never *known* to have been attained. Those who climbed so high as to disappear from human sight may in fact have fallen and perished. And thus Babbalanja pities the "wilful boy": "How earnestly he struggles in his bonds. But though rejecting a guide, still he clings to that legend of the peak."[1] Even if we were to ignore doubts concerning the Church, Melville demonstrates that its ministers are in fact useless. Pani, the imperious guide, is blind; his sight is no keener than that of the child that leads him. He mistakenly points out a stone idol as the home of a god who is alleged to live in a nearby tree; yet he is incensed when the wilful boy refuses to accept him as his guide to the peak of Ofo. Even though the boy is given little chance of coming face to face with Oro, we cannot but sympathize with his complaint that Pani, his attendants, and his incense obscure rather than illuminate the image of Oro in the great Temple.

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[1] _Mardi_, II, 30. [2] _Ibid._, p. 33.

Moreover, the supreme pontiff, "This man of men; this same Hivohitee, whose name rumbled among the mountains like a peal of thunder," is, like Pani, nothing but "a bearded old hermit."[2] The voyagers seek the wise man throughout Maramma, hoping that he can inform them of the whereabouts of Yillah. They come upon a tower; and its mysterious inhabitant invites Yoomy into its gloomy interior, where the following conversation takes place:

> "What see you, mortal?"
> "Chiefly darkness," said Yoomy, wondering at the audacity of the question.
> "I dwell in it. But what else wee you, mortal?"
> "The dim gleaming of thy gorget."
> "But that is not me. What else dost thou see?"

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[1] *Mardi*, II, 9.

[2] *Ibid.*, p. 48.

> "Nothing."
> "Then thou hast found me out, and seen all! Descend."[1]

Once again, the man of religion has proven to be only a man, prey to the uncertainties and vices common to all men. The inevitable result of this equality of all men in their search for truth through formal religion -- ever-increasing sectarianism -- is demonstrated in the "gallery of the gods." Here the travelers find scores of gods, all supposedly inferior to Oro but all defended violently. Babbalanja notices that all the idols are defaced in some way and asks Mohi why:

> To which, Braid-Beard made answer, that they had been thus defaced by hostile devotees; who quarrelling in the great gallery of the gods, and getting beside themselves with rage, often sought to pull down, and demolish each other's favourite idols.
>
> "But behold," cried Babbalanja, "there seems not a single image unmutilated. How is this, old man?"
>
> "It is thus. While one faction defaces the images of its adversaries, its own images are in like manner assailed; whence it comes that no idol escapes."[2]

Again it is an interesting index to Melville's increased maturity at the time of Mardi that, despite his many attacks on the formal religion of Maramma, there is little of the vitriol that we find throughout Typee and Omoo. In its place is a deep sympathy for those struggling, as he struggled, to attain some sort of religious certainty. His portrait of a young girl's reaction to Pani's mistaken identification of an idol is one marked by pity without condescension:

> "Thrice sacred Ananna," murmured the sad-eyed maiden, falling upon her knees before Doleema, "receive my adoration. Of thee, I know nothing, but what the guide has spoken. I am but a poor, weak-minded maiden, judging not for myself, but leaning upon others that are wiser. These things are above me. I am afraid to think. In Alma's name, receive my homage."[3]

This is the same girl who, in an instinctive movement of human charity, had used some of her clothes to cover the beggar that Pani had stripped. The greedy Pani himself is not totally condemned. Melville abandons his adopted point of view completely[1] to enter the mind of the priest:

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[1] Mardi, II, 46. [2] Ibid., p. 28. [3] Ibid., p. 18.

> That boy, that wild, wise boy, has stabbed me to the heart. His thoughts are my suspicions. But he is honest. Yet I harm none. Multitudes must have unspoken meditations as well as I. Do we then mutually deceive? Off masks, mankind, that I may know what warranty of fellowship with others my own thoughts possess. Why, upon this one theme, oh Oro! must all dissemble? Our thoughts are not our own. Whate'er it be, an honest thought must have some germ of truth. But we must set, as flows the general stream; I blindly follow, where I seem to lead; the crowd of pilgrims is so great, they see not there is none to guide . . . . What is this subtle something that is in me, and eludes me? Will it have no end? When, then, did it begin? All, all is chaos! What is this shining light in heaven, this sun they tell me of? Or, do they lie? Methinks, it might blaze convictions; but I brood and grope in blackness; I am dumb with doubt; yet, 'tis not doubt, but worse: I doubt my doubt.[2]

This is no monster, but a poor, weak man who tries to believe that his fraud will eventually do some good to others and to himself. Even Hivohitee, a worse pretender than Pani, has his moment of honesty, as we have seen. Melville's final judgment of Maramma, then, is not the withering scorn of a Rabelais or Voltaire. It is merely Babbalanja's quiet assertion that "Yillah may have touched these shores; but long since she must have fled."[3]

In contrast to his examination of Maramma, Melville's portrayal of Serenia must have been a labor of love. Serenia embodies fully the conditions under which Melville wished men to live together, conditions which embrace both religious faith and respect for human dignity. The Serenians, taking Alma at His word, love each other in act as well as word. In fact, since they know nothing "absolutely," they "care not for men's words; we look for creeds in actions."[1] Alma has not revealed all truth, nor is He the only one to have revealed any. His immense value lies in teaching man that there is good within him and enjoining him to practice it. Human reason is honored rather than denigrated. The worship of God is carried out not by building expensive temples but by reducing the hardships of the poor. So powerful is the example of the Serenians (their only weapon of evangelism) that Mohi, Yoomy, Babbalanja, and even the supposedly indifferent Media decide to remain with them. But there is a flaw in the unanimity of the party; the long-dormant Taji suddenly awakens and refuses to join his companions. He insists upon continuing the search for the elusive Yillah.

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[1] One of the very few times he does so in the book.

[2] Mardi, II, 20-21. [3] Ibid., p. 30.

What is perhaps more surprising than Taji's rejection of Melville's self-created religious utopia is the attitude of some Melville critics that Babbalanja's acceptance of Serenia is reprehensible. Milton Stern implies that Melville sees Babbalanja as a coward who gives in weakly to the facile idealism of Serenia: "Babbalanja has all the good insights and realizations, and he talks the good fight, but as one of the possible interpretations of his name suggests ('babbling tongue'), he merely talks it."[2] In the opinion of Merlin Bowen as well, Melville sees Babbalanja as a man who submits weakly though perhaps not inexcusably to the impenetrable mystery of the world.[3] Just what set of norms does Melville favor in Mardi, those of his primitive Christianity or those of the frantic Taji? Before attempting to answer this question, we must examine Taji's final attempt to find Yillah.

As Taji sets out from Serenia with Media, Mohi, and Yoomy, his friends attempt to dissuade him from further questing. Most eloquent and most discouraging is Babbalanja: "Taji! for Yillah thou wilt hunt in vain; she is a phantom that but mocks thee; and while for her thou madly huntest, the sin thou didst cries out, and its avengers still will follow. But here they may not come: nor those, who, tempting, track thy path."[1] But Taji is, as he says, "fixed as fate."[2] The trio search through unnamed islands without finding a trace of Yillah; and, as the poet and historian argue with Taji once more, Babbalanja's prophecy is fulfilled in Taji's mind:

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[1] Mardi, II, 365.

[2] Stern, Fine-Hammered Steel, p. 140.

[3] Merlin Bowen, The Long Encounter (Chicago, 1963), p. 204.

> Then sweet Yillah called me from the sea; -- still must I on! but gazing whence that music seemed to come, I thought I saw the green corse drifting by: and striking 'gainst our prow, as if to hinder. Then, then! my heart grew hard, like flint; and black, like night; and sounded hollow to the hand I clenched. Hyenas filled me with their laughs; death-damps chilled my brow; I prayed not, but blasphemed.[3]

Like Claudius in Hamlet, who also finds himself unable to pray, Taji cannot repent his crime while he enjoys or seeks to enjoy its fruits. The only place left for Taji to go in his search for innocence, then, is to the place which is the symbol of the human corruption that he is burdened with -- Flozella-a-Nina. The messengers of Hautia, queen of Flozella, have approached the voyagers several times in the course of the voyage, usually soon after the three avengers have reminded Taji of his guilt. In general the obscure message of the heralds has been that Taji's hopes are vain and that Hautia alone can give him happiness. Sensing instinctively that she is the antithesis of the long-sought Yillah, Taji more or less ignores her invitations. But now, tortured by the three avengers and despairing of his quest, Taji succumbs to Hautia's final temptation, one that combines sexual allure with a tentative promise of finding Yillah at last. Taji realizes that the two enticements are incompatible, but he has sensed all along that there is a strange relationship between the two women:

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[1] Mardi, II, 380. [2] Ibid., p. 381. [3] Ibid., p. 382.

> But how connected were Yautia and Yillah? Something I hoped; yet more I feared. Dire presentiments, like poisoned arrows, shot through me. Had they pierced me before, straight to Flozella would I have voyaged; not waiting for Hautia to woo me by that last and victorious temptation. But unchanged remained my feelings of hatred for Hautia; yet vague those feelings, as the language of her flowers. Nevertheless, in some mysterious way seemed Hautia and Yillah connected.[1]

It is on Flozella or nowhere that he must find Yillah.

The story he hears from Mohi as they land does not encourage him. A previous queen of the island is said by legend to have led the Mardians in battle against a pure-minded, angelic race which formerly lived among them. The winged beings fled to the skies, leaving the Mardians ignorant and fallible. This queen, a combination of Pandora and the snake in Eden, is the revered ancestor of Hautia. Thus is Taji brought face to face with the major dilemma of his quest. He is doomed to search for innocence in a world plagued by error, by guilt, by alienation from God and nature. His purpose is firm, however; and in the final chapters of Mardi he engages in a struggle with Hautia similar to Tannhauser's with Venus. She tries to make him accept her in Yillah's place: "Come! let us sin, and be merry."[2] He partially submits to her only to learn more of Yillah, and she is finally forced to employ a potion to keep him on the island. His three friends must leave him, but before they do Mohi tells him a story to prove that "the maidens of Hautia are all Yillahs, held captive, unknown to themselves."[3] A young man searching for a lost lover has found her blue eyes looking out from the black eyes of a maiden on Flozella. Though she is changed from her previous self, he wins her, only to be discovered and nearly murdered by Hautia.

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[1] Mardi, II, 386. [2] Ibid., p. 395. [3] Ibid., p. 392.

Taji is certain after the relation of this tale that Hautia has captured Yillah; and the angry queen, unable to tempt him to join her in love, confirms his fears. Having shown him the maiden's rose pearl, she sends him to a "transparent lake" where "conflicting curents met, and wrestled," finally flowing out to sea. There he sees the phantom of Yillah whirled deep into the ocean. Found wandering on the beach by Mohi and Yoomy, Taji suddenly decides that "a life of dying" is not "worth living o'er again" and heads their boat out to sea beyond the reefs of Mardi. His companions are horrified: "Nay, madman! Serenia is our haven. Through yonder strait, for thee, perdition lies. And from the deep beyond, no voyager e'er puts back."[1] But Taji, his search ended permanently, has decided that he can remain no longer in a world of despair. "Now, I am my own soul's emperor; and my first act is abdication! Hail! realm of shades!"[2] Taji, like Tannhauser, is destroyed by his direct encounter with the world's evil; but ironically there is no "Pilgrim's Chorus" at the end of Mardi to reflect the hero's salvation. Instead Taji is followed from the world by "a shallop, three fixed spectres leaning o'er its prow: three arrows poising."[3]

Whose position, after all is done, does Melville support -- Taji's or his comrades'? The fact that there are two potentially acceptable answers to this question indicates to me the possibility that Melville could support neither position. Each has a validity of its own, and each has damaging limitations. The aspect of human life reflected in Taji's love for Yillah and its death in the bowers of Hautia was to become in Pierre an almost overwhelming element of Melville's vision. Man's search for meaning, for a way to extricate himself from a world in which "order" itself is based on random selection, is frustrated by his ignorance, his weakness, and his selfishness. But beyond these obstacles lies another, far more powerful enemy to man's spiritual progress. On one level it is a force which, like Hautia's sensuality, seeks to make man completely instead of partly an animal. In its more general aspect, however, the specter which haunts Taji is akin to Freud's id -- an energy inherently destructive, inherently chaotic, inherently opposed to order of any sort. One can ascribe this power to Original Sin, as Melville does in his essay on Hawthorne; or one can call it "evil," as Melville does many times; yet it often goes far beyond conventional attitudes toward evil. Man's nature, according to Melville, is not essentially corrupted by the Fall; it is merely split, hung in an uncomfortable balance between a potential heaven and a threatening hell. This is the lesson Taji learns in his quest: that man so often seeks to attain tranquility through violence; that he is led to kill in his search for life; that in attempting to build he often destroys. Taji's marriage to Yillah is corrupted not only by the positive evil he perpetrated in order to gain her but by the very nature of human love. The "curtain of flesh on the bed of our desire" leads man to consummate a relationship of order and peace in the violence of the sexual act. Taji tries to return to primal harmony in a relationship with Yillah. Finding himself thwarted in this effort, and seeing his comrades' efforts to progress dialectically toward final truth likewise falter, Taji decides that life is worthless. Whatever he may have felt later in his life, Melville was obviously not in a suicidal mood during the composition of Mardi. Moreover, Charles Feidelson expresses what must have occurred to most readers of Mardi when he contends that its "somber conclusion . . . is openly exaggerated for effect; Melville is half-amused both at Taji's histrionics and at his own."[1] Yet if Melville's treatment of Taji's viewpoint is in part a burlesque, it may have been because that viewpoint was more attractive to his mind than he might have wished.

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[1] Mardi, II, 399. [2] Ibid., p. 400. [3] Ibid.

Melville's portrait of Serenia, however, was apparently drawn by a loving hand. Embodied in Serenian life are the Christian tenets that Melville most admired. Moreover, he had gone to great lengths in Mardi to show that the belief that man's reason alone could penetrate the mystery of the universe was a foolish one. He could not have condemned Babbalanja, therefore, for his acceptance of the Serenian tenet that reason "no longer domineers; but still doth speak."[2] As Merrell Davis suggests, Babbalanja has not searched for Yillah but for a rational answer to his questionings.[3] Finally convinced that his hopes are futile, he embraces the Serenian system as a carefully considered compromise rather than as an act of cowardice. In fact the question is not whether the Serenian compromise is an honorable one but whether the advantages it promises are satisfying or even possible. Babbalanja accepts the fact that rationally attained ultimate truth is a false hope, but Serenia offers him merely a social context within which to practice morality. He has already expressed a desire for this type of life when he speculates that "I can most happily, or least miserably exist, by the practice of righteousness."[4] But while Melville recognizes the radicalism and even the potential dangers of attempting to transcend the finitude of man's vision, he is not satisfied with the Serenian life. It asks man to give up the search for solidity, for certainty; but it does not substitute any actual communion with the source of permanent order -- God. Serenians adhere to the principles of Alma, but they seem neither to find nor to expect a relationship with Alma as man-God. This leaves man with nothing to depend upon but his own moral nature. It is at this point that Taji's story and his rejection of Serenia become relevant. Despite the Serenians' insistence that Alma's precepts are practicable, Melville was already beginning to wonder whether Christian morality is within the scope of unaided human virtue. And if, at the same time, religion can effect no actual, observable relationship between ultimate order and the individual, then it is not a sufficient guide toward man's salvation. These misgivings about religion are only implied in the reluctant rejection of Serenia in Mardi; but they will become more and more explicit in Melville's next three books. For the moment, there is little doubt that, for Melville, the precepts of Alma failed to "[lay] the lashings of the soul's wild aspirations after things unseen" as they had done for Babbalanja.[1]

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[1] Feidelson, Symbolism in American Literature, p. 175.

[2] Mardi, II, 371.

[3] Davis, Melville's "Mardi," pp. 198-199.

[4] Mardi, II, 126.

Mardi concludes, therefore, in an artistic anti-climax. Melville set out, more or less deliberately to explore the dark corridors of his divided mind ---and he succeeded. But, despite the superficial order which he imposed on his book, he brought to his portrayal of the "world of mind" no higher artistic unity. In the twentieth century we have become accustomed to literary renderings of fragmented personality; but we still have the right to demand on the part of the artist a partially successful attempt to create an order (precisely an artificial one) that transcends the chaos of the subject. This expectation is not fulfilled in Mardi. It may be an exciting experience to watch Melville growing and learning throughout the book, but it is not an entirely satisfying aesthetic one.

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[1] Mardi, II, 371.

Melville does indeed learn much from Mardi, and it is a relief from the intellectual and emotional chaos revealed there to see signs which point toward the future and Moby-Dick. He has learned, for example, what it means to be an artist rather than merely a writer. This growing awareness is clearly reflected in the letters written during the composition of the book, letters whose confidence contrasts with the timidity of those written during work on Typee and Omoo. Melville thought enough of his position as an aspiring artist to apologize for what was an obvious failure in terms which suggest frustration born of high hopes: "So, if after all these fearful, fainting trances, the verdict be, the golden haven was not gained; -- yet, in bold quest thereof, better to sink in boundless deeps, than float on vulgar shoals; and give me, ye gods, an utter wreck, if wreck I do."[1] He even goes so far as to discuss allegorically the artistic process in general and Mardi in particular. Babbalanja answers the charge that the "Koztanza" is "wild, unconnected, all episode" by asserting that "so is Mardi itself: -- nothing but episodes."[2] Yet even Melville is not really satisfied with this answer. He realizes that he has not controlled his outpourings, that he has not in fact rendered them fully intelligible: "Your highness, even in his calmer critic moods, Lombardo was far from fancying his work. He confesses, that it ever seemed to him but a poor scrawled copy of something within, which, do what he would, he could not completely transfer."[3] All he can hope is that the effort he has made to express himself artistically will not go totally unappreciated, that his work will be completed by others: "Somewhere

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[1] Mardi, II, 277. [2] Ibid., p. 329. [3] Ibid., p. 334.

Mardi has a mighty heart -- that struck, all the isles shall resound!"[1]

Lombardo complains that he was forced to complete his Koztanza by his need for money: "'Oh, that I was not thus spurred!' cried he; 'but like many another, in its very childhood, this poor child of mine must go out into Mardi, and get bread for its sire.'"[2] But Babbalanja asserts that "ere Necessity plunged spur and rowel into him, he knew not his own paces. That churned him into consciousness; and brought ambition, ere then dormant, seething to the top, till he trembled at himself."[3] The same is obviously true of Melville. Had he not begun Mardi in order to support himself and his wife, he would never have progressed beyond being a skillful writer of somewhat unconventional adventure books. He did begin Mardi, however; and as he wrote, the view of truth that had informed Typee and Omoo changed considerably.

Melville devoted Mardi to an examination of the avenues toward a permanent, stable truth. His failure not only to find a satisfactory path to truth but even to make the book itself cohere led him to believe that truth could not be found, that the discursive method upon which Mardi was based was a useless one. Early in the book, Babbalanja is somewhat contemptuous of artistic pursuits: "'Even so,' said Babbalanja, 'Yoomy, you have overstepped your province. My lord Media well knows, that your business is to make the metal in you jingle in tags, not ring in the ingot.'"[4] But later on Babbalanja is willing to grant much more substance to art:

> Yoomy: poets both, we differ but in seeming; thy airiest conceits are as the shadows of my deepest ponderings; though Yoomy soars, and Babbalanja dives, both meet at last. Not a song you sing, but

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[1] Mardi., II, 332. [2] Ibid., pp. 334-335. [3] Ibid., p. 323.

[4] Mardi, I, 315.

> I have thought its thought; and where dull Mardi sees but your rose, I unfold its petals, and disclose a pearl.[1]

The image of the rose and pearl here is interesting, for these two objects are also representative of Yillah in the book. Perhaps Melville was beginning to see in art some possibility of achieving the harmony that Yillah stands for. At the end of the novel he seems to be contemplating art as a weapon in itself against the radical disorder of the universe and the artistic struggle as a process of ordering reality. Lombardo expresses this ideal, using one of Melville's favorite images for permanence -- the pyramid:

> Oh! could Mardi but see how we work, it would marvel more at our primal chaos, than at the round world thence emerging. It would marvel at our scaffoldings, scaling heaven; marvel at the hills of earth, banked all round our fabrics ere completed. -- How plain the pyramid! . . . . There it stands, -- part of Mardi: claiming kin with mountains; -- was this thing piecemeal built? -- It was. Piecemeal? -- atom by atom it was laid. The world is made of mites.[2]

If Truth, the bringing of order and meaning to experience, does not exist outside of man, or if it does but man cannot discover it, then he must create it himself. "[W]e are our own worlds," says Babbalanja,[3] and in paraphrasing Lombardo he outlines the implications of this fact:

> [T]hough Lombardo abandoned all monitors from without; he retained one autocrat within -- his crowned and sceptred instinct. And what, if he pulled down one gross world, and ransacked the ethereal spheres, to build up something of his own -- a composite: -- what then? matter and mind, though matching not, are mates; and sundered oft, in his Koztanza they unite: -- the airy waist, embraced by stalwart arms.[4]

Perhaps, Melville seems to speculate, it is possible in this world of flux for man to create something which will endure, something which will in Keats's terms be true precisely because it is beautiful, something that will harmonize the duality of both man and the universe. Note that this as yet faint hope is based neither on an Aristotelean or an eighteenth-century belief that man's mind is a perfectly manageable tool nor on the romantic concept that the mind is itself divine. It is rather a compromise that many modern authors have accepted with more equanimity than Melville was ever to do: the hope that in a universe of change a man can shore against his ruins the ability to catch experience and hold it, still quivering with life, in an artistic structure.

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[1] Mardi, II, 136-137. [2] Ibid., p. 332. [3] Ibid., p. 279.

[4] Ibid., p. 328.

It is precisely at this point in Melville's intellectual gropings that religion and art come to revolve in the same sphere. What he sought in religion was a combination of a measure of certainty about the purpose of life and a code of action fitted to man's nature but transcending its fluctuations. But even as early in his career as Mardi Melville was beginning to fear that his quest was in vain. He simply would not accept, as Kierkegaard did, the tremendous paradox of gaining peace and certainty by recognizing life's absurdity, of reaching out for the hand of God over a chasm he knew to be unbridgeable, trusting nevertheless that it was being traversed. Under these circumstances, he began in Mardi to turn toward art as a ray of hope. He never accepted art as a satisfactory substitute for religious faith, as did so many artists of the nineteenth century in particular. He was never able to create from the artistic life any consistent ethic. Instead he returned to Christian ethics, which again and again he despaired of man's ever following. His own popular failure removed from him any hope of uniting men by his art, at least. But the artistic process did offer something not found in Serenia: the faint promise of a limited but nevertheless real permanence -- Truth.

Melville was to examine Christianity very carefully in his next two novels, searching for a better promise than he had found so far. At the same time, despite his railing about the quality of his work in Redburn and White-Jacket, he was to learn more and more about his craft. But his course had already been set. He had determined that he must be himself, trust in himself, whatever the result might be.

> Oh, reader, list! I've chartless voyaged. With compass and the lead, we had not found these Mardian Isles. Those who boldly launch, cast off all cables; and turning from the common breeze, that's fair for all, with their own breath fill their own sails. Hug the shore, naught new is seen; and "Land ho!" at last was sung, when a new world was sought.[1]

The adumbration of the land-sea image so prominent in Moby-Dick suggests where Melville was headed. Just as he had been awakened to what he was during the composition of Mardi, by the end of the book he had almost unconsciously determined what he was to be. A month after Mardi was published, he wrote to Duyckinck:

> I am glad you like that affair of mine. But it seems so long now since I wrote it, & my mood has so changed, that I dread to look into it, & have purposely abstained from so doing since I thanked God it was off my hands. -- Would that a man could do something & then say -- It is finished. -- not that one thing only, but all others -- that he has reached his uttermost, & can never exceed it. But live & push -- tho' we put one leg forward ten miles -- its no reason the other must lag behind -- no, that must again distance the other -- & so we go till we get the cramp & die.[2]

Mardi had served its purpose. Melville was ready to move on.

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[1] Mardi, II, 276. [2] Letters, p. 83.

Chapter IV

THE PERIOD OF ADJUSTMENT:

REDBURN AND WHITE-JACKET

> But now our age,
> So infidel in equipage,
> While carrying still the Christian name --
> For all its self-asserted claim,
> How fares it, tell.
>
> (*Clarel*, III, v, 147-151.)

Understandably, *Mardi* was a financial failure. And though he refused to admit it openly, the tone of Melville's letters about the book indicates that he knew that it was also an artistic failure. What may have been even more disturbing to him were the reviews, such as one in the *Home Journal*, which indicated that his readers had not even understood what he was attempting to do: "[*Mardi*] is characterized by the same adventurous spirit and freshness of description which rendered 'Typee' so great a favorite . . . ."[1] So in some bitterness of heart Melville abandoned the realm of the romance, and with it his high aspirations, and returned for his next two books to his own sailing experiences. It is well-known that Melville expressed no fondness for *Redburn* or *White-Jacket*. *Redburn* he called "beggarly" and said that he "wrote it to buy some Tobacco with."[1] The books, he wrote Lemuel Shaw, were "two jobs, which I have done for money -- being forced to it, as other men are to sawing wood."[2] It is likely, however, that such comments are the product more of a bitter mood than of a prevailing judgment. In fact Redburn and White-Jacket are anything but total failures, and they evidence the intellectual and imaginative growth which was to culminate in the writing of Moby-Dick.

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[1] Quoted in Leyda, I, 302.

Of immediate importance to this study are the subtle shifting of Melville's religious thought in Redburn and White-Jacket and his increased capacity for creating artistic structures appropriate to his philosophical questioning. The investigation of the implications of Christianity is not as intense in Redburn and White-Jacket as it is in Mardi, but it is perhaps more pervasive. Each in his own way, Redburn and White-Jacket are confronted directly with the world's evil. Both are forced to examine not only man as an individual but man in society, the context in which the evil inherent in human nature is most evident. Both are appalled by what they find, and both spend some time seriously considering the ability of religion to cope with a world so out of joint. But, as we shall see, there is a difference in the ultimate reaction of each man to what he finds in the life to which he has been newly awakened. Melville's religious doubts, expressed indirectly in Taji's rejection of Serenia, will become more instead of less pronounced. In Moby-Dick he will attempt to weld not only the doubts but Taji's despair as well into a finely balanced artistic resolution.

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[1] Journal of a Visit to London and the Continent, edited by Eleanor Melville Metcalf (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1948), p. 23.

[2] Letters, p. 91.

And Melville's ambitious undertaking in Moby-Dick succeeds as well as it does because in Redburn and White-Jacket he re-establishes the imaginative control over his material that he lost in Mardi. No one would be rash enough to assert that either of these books is flawless; but, within the limitations that he was forced to adopt in their composition, they mark an advance in technical novelistic proficiency beyond that demonstrated in any of his previous books. Typee and Omoo are essentially factual narratives presented in a fictional context and embellished with novelistic techniques. Mardi, on the other hand, almost totally abandons the world of experience for the world of mind. Redburn and White-Jacket, like Moby-Dick, are basically imaginative works with a firm factual background. I am not saying here that the percentage of "fact" as compared to "fiction" in Redburn and White-Jacket is less than that in Typee and Omoo. The question is one not of statistics but of emphasis. Despite their author's attempt to be "popular," Redburn and White-Jacket were obviously conceived as imaginative creations structured around incidents culled from Melville's life rather than as mere fictional renderings of personal experiences. Thus Redburn's narrative is not just Melville's remembrance of disillusionment past; it is a carefully contrived Bildungsroman, a re-enactment of the encounter with evil that every man must undergo if he is to be a man. And despite his down-to-earth propagandizing against flogging, Melville's somewhat abortive attempt to make of the Neversink a microcosm is closer to the artistic center of the book than his factual description of life on a warship. In Redburn and White-Jacket, for the first time in his career, Melville uses his material -- whether drawn from his experiences or from the tumult of his mind -- as material, not as the end of composition. Throughout these two books we find a closer and closer approach to the concept of the imaginative ordering of the chaotic world which will become both a theme and a technique of Moby-Dick and which will be Melville's substitute for religion. As much as Melville railed at it, the period of adjustment between 1848 and 1850 was an indispensable stage in his artistic maturation.

Redburn

Despite the fact that Melville had more unkind things to say about Redburn than about White-Jacket, the earlier book is in many ways the more interesting of the two. Redburn is more tightly structured, less flawed by long descriptive digressions than White-Jacket. The reader becomes more involved with the character of Wellingborough Redburn than he can with the "flat" White-Jacket. And in Redburn for the first time Melville united experiential and spiritual autobiography. He attempted not to record but to recreate the outer and inner worlds of a young man modeled upon himself, to bring into being a new character and to watch him grow and learn and mature on his own terms.

The main critical question concerning Redburn has been and still is whether Melville achieved the distance from Redburn and his story necessary to make the book something more than unvarnished self-revelation. William H. Gilman establishes quite clearly that in neither his experiences nor his reaction to them is Redburn a carbon copy of Melville. But does Melville avoid what Gilman calls the "ruinous defect [of] a disrupting shift in the angle of vision"?[1] Is he able, in other words, to keep his inevitable commentary about the human condition within the fictional structure that he has created? The answer of most critics, including Gilman, has been negative. Melville, Gilman says, "continually employs Redburn's experiences as points of departure for adult commentary upon poverty, immigration laws, music, the duty of the clergy in the church militant, America as the promised land, and other topics."[1] But it is possible that Melville, a writer who normally flouted the rules of consistent point of view, may have paid for his transgressions with *Redburn*'s critical reputation. Accustomed to Melville's habitual carelessness and to his tendency to "preach," his readers and critics may have overlooked a more or less conscious effort in *Redburn* to employ point of view for pre-ordained thematic and artistic ends.

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[1] Gilman, Melville's Early Life and "Redburn," p. 208.

There are indeed two points of view in *Redburn*, one belonging to the young Redburn who is the subject of the story and the other to the older Redburn who is its narrator. The experiences of young Redburn on a voyage from New York to Liverpool and back, incidents which help transform a boy into a man, are narrated and assessed by the somewhat ironic older Redburn. At the same time the narrator reveals some details of his present life and a great deal of his state of mind by commenting in his own person upon what young Redburn sees and hears. But there is something about Melville's handling of this autobiographical structure (which after all is very common) that makes *Redburn* sound peculiarly contemporary. In most nineteenth-century novels of the *Bildungsroman* type, the narrator is himself a resolution of the thematic tensions within his own story. For example, we assume that the scale of values which Pip is brought to accept by the end of *Great Expectations* will remain the basis of his actions for the rest of his life. The fate of the older Redburn, however, is left undetermined at the end of the novel. Like many of his nineteenth-century counterparts, he views the follies of his youth with bemused irony; but the irony does not stop there. For the older Redburn is not at all sure what he has gained by his maturity, by the loss of his ridiculous and somewhat obnoxious youthful naiveté. He is no more comfortable financially than he was when he sailed to Liverpool. He is no less alienated from society, no less disturbed by the evil that he sees around him, no less doubtful of religion's power to change man's nature. In return for the agony of his progress from boyhood to manhood, Redburn has received nothing but a larger share of the fruits of Adam's sin. He has indeed become a man and found it nothing to rejoice over.

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[1] Gilman, p. 209.

The dual point of view in Redburn, then, seems to me a deliberate contrivance on Melville's part rather than the result of an uncontrolled impulse to impose his opinions upon the experiences of young Redburn. Not only is there evidence in the text to support this thesis, but Melville's situation at the time of Redburn's composition could easily have led him to portray Redburn in just this way. While reviewing his experiences for the book he was to write, Melville may have realized with bitterness that his own situation -- and not only its financial aspect -- was no better than it had been at the time of his own voyage to England. It cannot be denied that Melville's choice of a dual point of view for Redburn, perhaps the most ambitious artistic undertaking of his career up to this point, created problems which he did not fully overcome. His typically American tendency to use exaggeration and bombast for humorous effects at times overwhelms the somber voice of his narrator, as it does, for example, in Redburn's reminiscence of his meeting with the three young English girls (Chapter 43). The propaganda in the book for better treatment of sailors and for more strictly enforced immigration laws is much more pertinent to Melville's interests than to his narrator's. Finally, the presence of the older Redburn, even at his most believable moments, makes impossible an intense concentration upon the travails of a young man growing up. But this last problem, certainly the most serious, becomes an artistic defect only if we consider Redburn's maturation to be the central concern of the book. What I hope to demonstrate in the following discussion is that no radical disunity is caused by the presence of the two Redburns; rather the ironic continuity of their dual vision creates thematic intensity which surpasses that of the mere Bildungsroman.

The spiritual growth of young Redburn advances through three somewhat overlapping phases: awareness, knowledge, and action. He is awakened to his own nature and that of the world around him first by a progressive isolation from other human beings and then by a direct confrontation with the world's evil. Exposed to situations he has never before encountered, he tries to learn enough about himself and his environment to cope with them. Finally he attempts to break out of his isolation and re-establish contact with the world that has hurt him and with his fellow-sufferers. This tripartite process has already begun at the opening of Redburn. Redburn's father has died, leaving his family in genteel poverty and rudely shattering his young son's sense of familial security. One must be careful neither to exaggerate the importance of this situation, as young Redburn does, nor to minimize it. With adolescent intensity, young Redburn overreacts to his early disappointment:

> It was with a heavy heart and full eyes, that my poor mother parted with me; perhaps she thought me an erring and wilful boy, and perhaps I was; but if I was, it had been a hard-hearted world and hard time that had made me so. I had learned to think much and bitterly before my time; all my young mounting dreams of glory had left me;

> and at that early age I was as unambitious as a man of sixty.[1]

As Redburn himself admits, he is not driven to sea by abject poverty or unquenchable bitterness. He adduces his "naturally roving disposition"[2] as part of his motivation for enlisting as a sailor, and he devotes the whole first chapter to the history of his desire to visit foreign lands. Nevertheless it cannot be denied that the change in his fortunes impels Redburn to give vent to his wanderlust, impels him in fact to embark deliberately upon the maturation process that I have described above. His life has been touched by a power that he doesn't understand; and he feels that somehow a voyage will reveal to him both the nature of his enemy and the weapons with which to fight it, just as he believes that, were he able to break open his father's glass ship, he "would infallibly light upon something wonderful, perhaps some gold guineas."[3]

His expectations, of course, are childish. The forces which have as yet given him only the slightest hint of their power cannot be overcome so easily. Neither gold nor wisdom is to be had for the asking. The only light to be found in the bowels of a ship is the balefire of a rotting corpse. And the sparkling towns of Europe harbor evils undreamt of in America. Thus, having been initiated rather roughly into the world of adulthood, Redburn quite correctly sets out to learn as much as he can about his new environment; but he seriously miscalculates the rewards of his efforts and the sacrifices he will have to make to achieve them. Immediately after he leaves home, society breaks in upon his injured self-consciousness to inform him that it is capable of inflicting even more serious wounds. Redburn's reaction to the obvious contempt of the riverboat passengers for his shabbiness is immature and extreme, but it is also understandable. Though disappointed at his family's misfortune and vaguely embarrassed by not being dressed in the height of fashion, he is yet aware that he has not changed from what he was before his father's death. Thus he is not prepared for what is in effect a silent personal attack upon him for being poor. He has not yet learned, as Melville did at some time in his youth, that a society that believes financial prosperity to be a sign of God's favor can with perfect logic consider poverty to be a sin. Suddenly subject to social reprisal against his external appearance, Redburn becomes furious and wins a shallow victory over his complacent "persecutors" by frightening them with a gun. His situation is placed in a larger perspective when he tries to sell the very gun which had proved so unsatisfactory a weapon against the vague specter of prejudice. His dealings with the pawnbroker reveal to him the artificiality of social conventions which can make a miserly cheat appear morally upright while casting doubt upon the actions of those reduced to poverty through no fault of their own.

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[1] Herman Melville, Redburn ("Standard Edition"; London, 1922, Vol. V), p. 10.

[2] *Ibid.*, p. 1.

[3] *Ibid.*, p. 8.

Even before he reaches the ship, then, Redburn feels helpless to cope with the world outside the shelter of his home. And he has no choice but to discover a way to handle the hostility, personal and impersonal, which surrounds him; for in the course of the book the events on the riverboat are repeated over and over. Because he is usually barred specifically from participating in the society to which he should relate, Redburn is given the opportunity to examine himself and others very closely. He finds his condition on board ship worse than it was on land. He feels equal by birth to the courtly Captain Riga, but at sea the Captain reveals himself to be an irascible tyrant instead of the gentlemanly friend the boy had expected. To the officers, likewise, the proud young man is no better than a bond slave. They are an aristocracy, "as particular about being sirred as so many knights and baronets."[1]

Redburn thus finds himself placed on the level of the semi-barbaric, illiterate crew, and to his horror they reject him also. They object to his mincing manners; they are scornful of his utter ignorance of sea usages; and Jackson, whom they all fear, develops an intense hatred for him for no apparent reason. He is beginning to learn that being a poor boy sneered at by a boat-load of comfortable merchants is not the greatest anguish a man can undergo:

> [A]t last I found myself a sort of Ishmael in the ship, without a single friend or companion; and I began to feel a hatred growing up in me against the whole crew -- so much so, that I prayed against it, that it might not master my heart completely, and so make a fiend of me, something like Jackson.[2]

Redburn's situation in the wonderland of England is also one of alienation. He is a foreigner, he is poor, and, worst of all, he is a sailor. With chagrin he sees a Negro, oppressed in America, "recognizing his claims to humanity and normal equality"[3] while he (Redburn) is ejected from the "public" library. Even in the churches he attends in England he is often stared at and ushered to a remote seat behind a post: "The whole congregation seemed to know that I was a foreigner of distinction," comments the narrator ironically.[4]

From before the beginning of his voyage until its end, Redburn is pushed into a state of unwilled, desperate isolation. As painful as it is, however, this position gives the youth a clearer perspective on the world's evils, petty and serious, than he would otherwise have had. The young Redburn, one feels, is not by nature a social critic; even less is he naturally introspective. But his alienation from his fellow men and from the common institutions of society helps him to transcend his inherent snobbishness and religious narrowness. He finds the moral hypocrisy of the pawnbroker repeated in a more subtle form in Captain Riga's actions. Riga takes advantage of Redburn's naiveté and predisposition toward the aristocracy by pretending to be a suave, cultured businessman. But at sea he reveals himself to be an ill-mannered, despotic cheat. Redburn is also exposed to evil in its grossest form in the lives of the sailors, particularly in Jackson. But by the time the youth has left England, he is no longer as shocked by the sailors as he had been on the voyage out; for he has found in the dark alleys of Liverpool and the bright pleasure houses of London the same degradation of the human spirit which had shattered his moral equilibrium in the forecastle of the Highlander.

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[1] _Redburn_, p. 49.

[2] _Ibid_., p. 79.

[3] _Ibid_., p. 260.

[4] _Ibid_., p. 262.

Fleeing blindly from a situation which at the time seems to him painful in the extreme, Redburn is first cast into a social position little higher than the swine he must tend. He is then forced not only to admit the existence of but also to witness evil unimagined even by his elders in upstate New York. How is he to react? What shield is he to use to protect himself from the potentially destructive effects of a moral and emotional trauma? Redburn's first appeal is to what he already knows, to his background of experience and training. With regard to life at sea, of course, he is as helpless as an infant, and the narrator has as much fun at his expense as the sailors do. In fact Melville exploits Redburn's "greenness" too much; the youth is irritatingly stupid after experiences which would have permanently educated most men of average intelligence.

In his confrontation with evil and social alienation, however, Redburn's inadequacies are less obvious but equally crippling. Finding that any attempt to communicate with the officers and captain of the ship will be met with implacable hostility, he decides to relieve his uncomfortable social situation by manifesting his superiority over the crew. Adopting the very snobbery that had enraged him on the riverboat, he "subtly" informs sailor after sailor of his own social, educational, and spiritual accomplishments. His shipmates' reactions range from scornful laughter to outraged fury. Redburn's high birth and literacy mean nothing on a ship, where his ignorance of seamanship is both a nuisance and a potential danger. Yet he can still afford to indulge in feelings of moral enlightenment. He considers himself an "upright and sensible boy" and feels sorry for a sailor who shows "so plainly his ignorance and absence of proper views of religion."[1] With infinite complacency he condescends to admit that sailors are not "villains who loved wickedness for the sake of it, and would persist in wickedness, even in Paradise, if they ever got there."[2] Redburn's religious views receive only contempt until Max the Dutchman puts an end to his pretentiousness altogether. Having been criticized by Redburn for having two wives, Max

> turned round on me, very savagely; and after rating me soundly for meddling in concerns not my own, concluded by asking me triumphantly, whether Old King Sol, as he called the son of David, did not have a whole frigateful of wives; and that being the case, whether he, a poor sailor, did not have just as good a right to have two? "What was not wrong then, is right now," said Max . . . .[3]

By necessity rather than by desire Redburn must move toward a new understanding of his life. His first step in this direction is the anguished realization that what he has been taught by parents and books, much of it religious in nature, is not so much wrong but useless to him. He discovers, for example, that personal experience is a more convincing learning medium than the reading of books. Upon meeting a Greenlander and hearing him speak of his homeland, he reveals that he "had seen mention made of such things before, in books of voyages; but that was only reading about them, just as you read the Arabian Nights, which no one ever believes . . . . But I don't know exactly how to explain what I mean; but this much I will say, that I never believed in Greenland till I saw this Greenlander."[1] More importantly, Redburn finds that certain moral resolutions and the principles which support them are not universally applicable. Torn by seasickness he is forced to break his vow to the Temperance Society, finding as he does so that the immorality of drinking no longer looks so serious and that the first violation of his oath "insidiously opened the way to further breaches of it, which, though very slight, yet carried no apology with them."[2]

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[1] Redburn, p. 61. [2] Ibid., p. 59. [3] Ibid., p. 165.

Redburn's struggle with the necessity to cast off the naiveté of his childhood in order to take up the burden of a man is depicted in miniature in his reaction to the Liverpool that his father had visited. Redburn makes it clear that his great love for his father, combined with the dead man's own voyage to Europe, induced him to take to the sea himself. But almost immediately a wall begins to separate father and son. Redburn contends that he had always considered his father "a marvellous being, infinitely purer and greater than I was, who could not by any possibility do wrong, or say an untruth."[3] Yet as he sails from New York he asks how he could accept the fact "that he, my own father, whom I so well remembered, had ever sailed out of these Narrows . . . and gone to England, and France, Liverpool, and Marseilles. It was too wonderful to believe."[1] The intensity of Redburn's personal experience, rather than bringing him closer to his father's life, makes it more remote from his own. A second shock comes with Redburn's arrival in Europe. He is dismayed that the coast reveals nothing of the wonderland he had dreamed that his father visited: "Was that Ireland? Why, there was nothing remarkable about that; nothing startling. If that's the way a foreign country looks, I might as well have stayed home."[2] Liverpool itself, with its horrible slums, is no fairyland. And the high English aristocracy look less grand the more closely one observes them.

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[1] Redburn, pp. 51-52. [2] Ibid., p. 55. [3] Ibid., p. 43.

Redburn's final disappointment concerning his father's visit to Liverpool revolves around the guidebook the elder Redburn had used many years before. Redburn hopes to use the same book, literally to follow his father around the city and see what he had seen. Very quickly, however, the boy discovers that the book is so out of date that most of the buildings and landmarks directed to the reader's attention are now vanished. "It was a sad, a solemn, and a most melancholy thought. The book upon which I had so much relied . . . was next to useless. Yes, the thing that had guided the father could not guide the son."[3] It is nearly impossible for any reader to avoid seeing in the tableau of Redburn standing in the middle of Liverpool with his useless guidebook a picture of poor, bewildered Man holding an outdated, misleading Bible willed to him by a deceitful, possibly even a dead God. It would be a mistake, however, to force this incident, a clear indication that Melville was finally beginning to master the art of the symbol, into an allegorical mold. There is no doubt that Redburn's experience with the guidebook has serious religious implications, but they must be placed in a wider perspective. For example, Redburn makes an observation which Lawrance Thompson calls a "direct continuation" of Melville's attack on the Bible:[1] "But there is one Holy Guide-Book, Wellingborough, that will never lead you astray, if you but follow it aright . . . ."[2] I have no doubt that Melville meant this somewhat naive statement to be taken ironically, but this does not mean that Melville (or his disillusioned narrator) is waging all-out war against the Bible or the religion it represents. The passages surrounding Redburn's confession of faith, particularly his judgment that guidebooks "are the least reliable books in all literature,"[3] are intended, I think, to commute Redburn's expressed confidence to a healthy skepticism rather than to total rejection. And Redburn's comment on the Bible itself seems to be a warning to the reader that the guidebook and the Scripture are not to be completely identified. Actually Redburn's disillusioning experience is a repetition of the age-old process by which, with mental anguish as great as the physical pain of childbirth, son is separated from father, daughter from mother, one generation from its predecessor. If Redburn is a symbol of man wandering in an unhappy world unaided by a remote or even malicious God, he is also a young poet going hungry in a dirty apartment while his insensitive parents live in luxury or a young radical struggling to put his social ideals into practice while a somewhat complacent older generation continue to assert the validity of _their_ solutions. What Redburn learns by his experience is that he must depend upon himself. He must begin his life over again, and this time his method will be to follow his nose, as he says. For example, he has in no way become a rebel against Christianity; but if he is to accept its tenets he must do so existentially, on the basis of his own experiences and by the movements of his own heart. Melville has portrayed a poignant moment in the life of his young hero, if not with great subtlety then at least with symbolic economy.

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[1] Redburn, p. 43. [2] Ibid., p. 158. [3] Ibid., p. 200.

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[1] Lawrance Thompson, _Melville's Quarrel with God_ (Princeton, 1952), p. 84.

[2] _Redburn_, p. 201.

[3] _Ibid_.

Even while he is being disabused of his somewhat less than useful past training, Redburn is being subjected to a new education. Shocked by his confrontation with evil and the constant ridicule of his pretensions to morality and erudition, he is forced to recognize that there is more to life than his philosophy had foreseen. His first lesson is that evil is a much more ambiguous entity than he could have imagined. Despite his mortal terror of the man, Redburn is able to see in Jackson's seemingly pointless hatred of him a human meaning:

> And I sometimes fancied it was the consciousness of his miserable, broken-down condition, and the prospect of soon dying like a dog, in consequence of his sins, that made this poor wretch always eye me with such malevolence as he did. For I was young and handsome, at least my mother so thought me . . . .[1]

Personified in Jackson, evil has become for Redburn something real, something concrete; and as much as it disgusts him, he cannot help seeing the human suffering it reveals:

> But there seemed even more woe than wickedness about the man; and his wickedness seemed to spring from his woe; and for all his hideousness there was that in his eye at times that was ineffably pitiable and touching; and though there were moment when I almost hated this Jackson, yet I have pitied no man as I have pitied him.[2]

Suffering -- that is the keynote of Redburn's education. He is forced to recognize that he has no monopoly on physical and mental anguish, that the pain he has undergone is the common lot of mankind. Though plagued at times by an adolescent self-centeredness, he cannot help being moved by the terrible degradation of the slum residents of Liverpool. The agony of the starving family that he discovers makes the "poverty" of his own family look like luxury. At the same time his aristocratic notions, already weakened by his recognition of the suffering a strict class system can cause, are further damaged by his relationship with Harry Bolton. Through Harry he discovers the aristocracy to be a conscienceless, hedonistic class, untouched and untroubled by the disease, starvation, and crime which surround it. In Harry himself Redburn finds a man so dominated by the dissipations of the wealthy that he cannot abandon them until he is financially ruined, a man so bound to his aristocratic mannerisms that he cannot rid himself of them even to avoid the persecution of the crew, a man so ill-fitted for normal human life that he is helpless to support himself by normal means of employment. Nowhere for Redburn, then, is there any respite from the sight of human degradation and suffering. Even the immigrants, coming to a land which promises them freedom and justice, are forced to sail in a ship ill-equipped to carry them, segregated from crew and regular passengers alike, and are required to huddle together in close quarters when a plague breaks out in their midst.

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[1] Redburn, p. 74. [2] _Ibid_., p. 134.

Having been compelled by circumstances and his own ignorance to become an isolato and having discovered that, while his alienation is real, his uniqueness is a figment of his imagination, Redburn is ready to complete the final stage in his enforced maturation -- to try to re-establish communion with the rest of mankind. His first feeble step in this direction is the growth of a sincere sympathy in his heart for the demonic Jackson. Eventually the boy manages by his improved seamanship to gain the friendship of some of the others in the crew, and he joins them in contributing money to help a young stowaway. In England, unable to remain a mere spectator of a parade of poverty, he attempts to help a starving woman and her children. Finally, he befriends the desperate Harry Bolton. Redburn has come a long way in recognizing Harry not as a member of a class more wealthy than he himself will ever be but as a man who needs help. He has broken from his shell of self-pity and has rejoined his fellow sufferers in the rest of humanity; but at this point something goes sour in his story, something which makes Redburn more than a simple Bildungsroman. Examined closely, Redburn's attempts to act upon his new-found knowledge of the world seem terribly futile. He is unable to express openly his sympathy for Jackson because of the sailor's implacable enmity and because of Redburn's fear of him. The fifteen dollars contributed to the stowaway seems a pitifully small bounty for a penniless, six-year-old orphan. Redburn himself decides that the food he brings to the starving family only prolongs their dying since he cannot enlist anyone to render them more effective assistance. Despite his closeness to Harry Bolton, he is not able to save the young nobleman from squandering his last pound or to protect him from humiliation at the hands of the crew. And when the two finally arrive at New York, Redburn is forced to leave the confused, forlorn Harry in order to visit his own family. In desperation, Harry signs for another dreaded voyage and is eventually killed at sea.

H. Bruce Franklin suggests that young Redburn forfeits all claim to increased maturity and human sensitivity by his cruel desertion of the nearly helpless Harry Bolton.[1] Mr. Franklin, I think, criticizes Redburn too severely, but this incident does place the boy's experiences in a strange perspective. We begin to ask ourselves, admitting that Redburn has learned something during his voyage and has grown in the process, what has he really gained? Materially, he has profited not at all. He has spent a few months of his life at sea and in foreign lands, but he finds England disappointing and he receives no wages at all for his hard work. He has learned to be a sailor, but his skills will earn him no money in America. On the spiritual side of the ledger the results are similar. Redburn has learned that the world is infinitely more complex, more fraught with danger, more permeated by evil than he had ever suspected; yet this knowledge brings him no closer to a method of coping with the inhuman forces which threaten his life. He has learned that he cannot depend with perfect faith upon the teachings of the past, that he must be his own father and mother; yet this decision gives him no further inner light by which he can guide himself. He has learned that it would be wise to make this a "mutual joint-stock world" in which each man helps his fellow-sufferers; yet every attempt he makes to put this dictum into practice is more or less a failure. In the end, like every one of Melville's heroes, Redburn remains alone if not lonely, not because he does not want friendship but because the conditions of human life do not permit such an attachment. His abandonment of Harry can indeed serve as a symbol of his situation after his voyage; and what the symbol says to us is not that the maturing process that Redburn has undergone is a failure but that it is futile. He has learned, at least in part, to see the world as it is; but he has not learned how to transform his knowledge into effective action, into a moral life in the broadest sense. "But I cheered [Harry] as well as I could," he says; but he admits to "needing a little cheering myself; even though I had got home again."[1]

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[1] H. Bruce Franklin, "Redburn's Wicked End," Nineteenth-Century Fiction, XX (September, 1965), 190-194.

Having seen young Redburn's education come to an apparent dead-end, we should begin to hear the echo of the narrator, the man whose "father" was the youthful sailor, the man with whom we now must deal. Speaking of the way in which the wealthy hold the poor in contempt, he explains: "But I, Redburn, am a poor fellow who have hardly ever known what it is to have five silver dollars in my pocket at one time; so, no doubt, this circumstance has something to do with my slight and harmless indignation at these things."[2] Early in the book he says that the figurehead on the glass ship, the symbol of his youthful illusions, broke from its position on the day he took to sea. The figurehead is still broken, and Redburn will not have him "put on his legs again, till I get on my own."[3] The narrator seems to be giving us the basis here for the "hard, bitter core of the book" which William Gilman feels "interferes with [Redburn's] artistic success."[4] He admits that he had indulged "in some romantic and misanthropic views of life, such as many boys in my circumstances are accustomed to do,"[5] but he warns the reader that his early experiences are not therefore rendered meaningless or trivial: "But these thoughts are bitter enough even now, for they have not yet gone quite away."[6] The narrator has long known that his story of young Redburn reveals to us: despite the fact that his voyage to Liverpool made him wiser, it did not rid him of the feeling that by sailing through the Narrows he had been "thrust out of the world."[7] He is still alienated from a world in which physical and mental suffering is an almost inevitable concomitant of breathing -- alienated not in the sense that he does not himself participate in the suffering but in that, isolato that he is, he cannot reach out his hands and relieve the agony in his own soul or in others.

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[1] *Redburn*, p. 392.
[2] *Ibid*., p. 314.
[3] *Ibid*., p. 9.
[4] Gilman, p. 233.
[5] *Redburn*, p. 27.
[6] *Ibid*., p. 10.
[7] *Ibid*., p. 46.

The intensity of Redburn's state of anguished, passive awareness is increased by two conditions, one external, one internal. First of all, he is poor -- poor in a land where the opportunities to prosper seem infinite, at least in comparison with those in Europe. His voyage has shown him that he and his countrymen suffer much less from poverty, on the whole, than do the residents of the Liverpool slums; but his failure to improve his financial state during the years since his trip also demonstrates that the New World offers no escape from the human condition so horribly illustrated in the Old. It is as if Moses had been taken up to the mountain-top and shown not a land flowing with milk and honey but an endless expanse of desert. Secondly, beginning with his experiences as a young man, Redburn has transcended feelings of mere self-pity to arrive at a sincere sympathy with the world's suffering souls. Acquainted with some deprivation in his own life and introduced to the fullness of human degradation at sea and in Liverpool, he has linked his spirit with the rest of humanity in a bond of sorrow. In this sense Redburn, even more than Jackson, may be a prototype of Ahab; for neither can he escape the endless parade of unmerited suffering which the world offers to his sight, nor can he avoid that conclusion that his vision may reveal the essence of human life.

Redburn, then, is not a story of youthful disillusionment exaggerated for the sake of pathos; it is a vision of the seeds of one man's maturity placed in a perspective that is doubly ironic. Redburn now knows, first of all, that his youthful reaction to the first impact upon him of the world's evil, as overwrought and as based on inadequate knowledge of human life as it was, was nevertheless perfectly justified. The human situation is capable of inspiring, if anything, more cynicism and gloom than young Redburn was able to espouse. Secondly, the narrator has discovered that the knowledge of the world which he suffered so much to obtain has done him absolutely no good. He is as helpless to cope with his situation and that of his fellow humans as young Redburn would have been to steer the _Highlander_ in a gale.

It should now be clear that the narrator's commentaries in _Redburn_, far from being impulsive intrusions upon the experiences and reactions of the young Redburn, form a body of interpretation fully in keeping with Melville's intentions. The narrator's observations themselves are quite simple in nature. He merely portrays a small portion of the inhumanity prevalent in so-called "civilization" and then appeals to the humane -- basically Christian -- principles of mankind to relieve the suffering in its midst. Melville's attitude toward "civilization" is no different in _Redburn_ from what it had been in _Typee_ and _Omoo_: civilized society harbors as much natural violence and evil as "primitive" societies do, if not more. He would agree with the implied judgment of one of the sailors on the _Highlander_ that "Madagasky" is the opposite of all that is disagreeable in civilization:

> "And what's the use of bein' _snivelised?_" said he to me one night during our watch on deck; "snivelised chaps only learns the way to take on 'bout life, and snivel. You don't see any Methodist chaps feelin' dreadful about their souls; you don't see any darned beggars and pesky constables in _Madagasky_, I tell ye . . . . "[1]

But Melville's treatment of society in _Redburn_ goes beyond this view. He is less interested in the social community as an abstraction, be it primitive or civilized, than he is in the immediate causes of human degradation. The point that _Redburn_'s narrator emphasizes is that _people_ hurt other people, injure them through indifference, hatred, or greed. Young Redburn, still shocked by his recent, undesired alienation from his fellow men, is given a few examples of the manner in which all men are isolated by their own selfishness. Captain Riga's treatment of the boy when he signs for the voyage goes beyond the necessities of good business to outright thievery. The cabin passengers on the voyage to Liverpool send a six-year-old orphan ashore provided with none of their ample provisions but a lace handkerchief and a card-case. The immigrants on the voyage back to New York are treated like cattle rather than human beings, despite the fact that they have given all their money to pay for the trip.

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[1] _Redburn_, p. 129.

It is Liverpool, however, that "picture of all that is dishonourable to civilization and humanity,"[1] that leaves the deepest scars on Redburn's memory, as it must have left on Melville's. Melville probably encountered more poverty, more misery, more vice during his stay in Liverpool than at any other time of his life; and the intensity of his reaction is mirrored in his narrator's revulsion at what he had seen during _his_ youth, particularly in his vivid description of the starving family. The case of the woman and her children is appalling in itself; it is even more chilling when we view it as a microcosm of civilization's propensity to _systematize_ human suffering. Who is responsible for the horrible death of the family? Do not the aristocracy share in the guilt by being able to spend their days bathed in luxury while remaining indifferent to those who cannot even afford food? Yes, but they also make war upon themselves, not only by intrigue but by squandering their fortunes in anguished enslavement to a vice like gambling. Are not the common working people whom Redburn begs to help the family partially to blame: the policeman who refuses to interfere because the cellar in which the family is entombed is not on his beat; the warehouse owner who refuses space in his building or even a little food; the tavernkeeper who refuses to give Redburn a pitcher filled with water; the aged ragpicker who curses the dying woman for her immorality? Yes, these are guilty; but at the same time they are as oppressed as the woman herself. They belong to what Redburn calls "classes of men in the world who bear the same relation to society at large that the wheels do to a coach: and are just as indispensable," men whom "no contrivance, no sagacity can lift . . . out of the mire; for upon something the coach must be bottomed; on something the insiders must roll."[1] Does not the man who gave the woman three illegitimate children and then abandoned her become her murderer? Yes, but her own human weakness must also have played a part in her tragedy.

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[1] _Redburn_, p. 239.

So the cycle continues: the exploited become exploiters; the hunters become the hunted. And in the background lurk wretches such as the inhabitants of Liverpool's "Booble Alley" who pander to the vices preying on others and at times become predators themselves, "a company of miscreant misanthropes, bent upon doing all the malice to mankind in their power."[2] The narrator's reaction to these evildoers is interesting because it reveals not only the older Redburn's state of mind but a broadening of Melville's own world-view: "With sulphur and brimstone they ought to be burned out of their arches like vermin."[3] Such a prescription is at odds with Redburn's tolerant appraisal of Jackson, but both judgments spring from the same source. Redburn grieves for Jackson because he sees that beneath his misanthropy is great personal suffering; he hates "Booble Alley" residents because they bring the same sort of misery to the hearts of others. To be perfectly consistent, Redburn should pity all criminals as he pities Jackson, but bitterness cannot always be fair. The sight of the starving family, he says, "was enough to turn the heart to gall; and make a man-hater of a Howard."[1] Here Melville confronts the ambivalence of human evil in its most concrete form, and in doing so he implicitly elaborates upon a point he had hinted at in Mardi: man's rationality, rather than curbing the mindless brutality that he shares with nature in general, makes it even more horribly effective. For man's mind alienates him from nature just enough so that his acts of violence become purposeful rather than instinctive. But like the Mosaic Law as described by St. Paul, rationality automatically imposes moral strictures upon man without necessarily granting him the power to be moral. A true humanitarian, then, must indeed become a "man-hater," because human nature is simultaneously tragic (because man had no part in making it the two-headed monster that it is) and despicable (because, despite the uncontrollable conditions of its existence, the human heart does undeniably engender its own evil).

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[1] Redburn, p. 177.   [2] Ibid., p. 246.   [3] Ibid.

Faced with a world out of joint, the passive Redburn refuses to believe that he can effectively challenge the universe as Ahab tries to do. Rather he takes the common Melvillean position that the only part of his world that man can hope to change is himself. Aside from a few appeals for social and legal reform, he focuses his attention upon religion as a hope for this transformation. As usual, the established church is of little value in man's quest for his own betterment. Conscious of the extent of physical suffering in society, Redburn complains that "the sums spent in erecting magnificent cathedrals might better go to the founding of charities."[1] This criticism could have been qualified somewhat were poor sinners able at least to worship in a place of beauty, but Redburn's cold welcome in a London church convinces him that even this benefit is not available to every Christian. Indeed for those excluded from polite society, for those that need moral guidance and encouragement the most, there is no Christian ministry at all save that rendered by a few hardy street preachers.

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[1] Redburn, p. 232.

Perhaps even more disturbing to Redburn and to Melville than the failure of the clergy to preach and practice Christianity as they should is the fact that Christians in general seem totally unchanged by the religion that they profess. They fail to obey Christ's great command to love their neighbor, the necessary adjunct to loving God. They lack, even in rudimentary form, Christ's vision of human misery, the vision which Melville insists informs the Sermon on the Mount. Speaking of the plight of the immigrants, Redburn complains:

> We talk of the Turks, and abhor the cannibals; but may not some of _them_ go to heaven before some of _us_? We may have civilised bodies and yet barbarous souls. We are blind to the real sights of this world; deaf to its voice; and dead to its death. And not till we know that one grief outweighs ten thousand joys will we become what Christianity is striving to make us.[2]

This blindness, Redburn contends, is not only inhumane; it is absurd. Christians who fail to recognize that their religion is based in part on a bond of human love among fellow sufferers are like the cabin passengers who become suddenly religious during an epidemic, even though "an everlasting Asiatic cholera is forever thinning our ranks; and die by death we all must at last."[3] Christianity can only be of use to us, then, if we keep in clear sight the chaos which it was meant to counteract. "Ah! what are our creeds, and how do we hope to be saved? . . . Surrounded as we are by the wants and woes of our fellow-men, and yet given to follow our own pleasures, regardless of their pains, are we not like people sitting up with a corpse, and making merry in the house of the dead."[1]

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[1] _Redburn_, p. 261.

[2] _Ibid_., p. 379.

[3] _Ibid_., p. 373.

Note that Melville is not recommending in Redburn that Christianity become nothing but a medium for supplying the physical needs and wants of its adherents. Nor is he hoping for an instant moral transformation of mankind. It is the very fact that God obviously intends to work no miracle for mankind as a whole that convinced Melville that the first step toward the success of Christianity must be an improvement in the relationships of individual men with one another. Men cannot wait for death to re-establish communication between themselves and God. It is in this context that we must understand what appears to be a censurable secularism in Melville's religious thought. It is perfectly fine to say, as Redburn does, that "we feel and we know that God is the true Father of all, and that none of His children are without the pale of His care";[2] but, Melville would say, we have no absolute proof that God interferes directly in life on earth. Thus, unless Christ's teachings are to be perverted into a simple command of patience under oppression in expectation of a reward after death, it is the purpose of Christianity to direct the minds and hearts of mankind toward God through their love for their fellow men. As long as Christianity fails to do this Christ's special mission on earth -- to mediate between mankind and a remote God -- is also unfulfilled. Thus the inhumanity Christians manifest toward one another is not merely an indictment of them; it is a source of severe doubt in Melville's mind about the inherent efficacy of Christianity itself.

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[1] Redburn, p. 237. [2] Ibid., p. 179.

Redburn is more than a plea for Christian social reform; it is an anguished appeal for evidence that the whole Christian message of earthly love and eternal salvation is credible in such a world as ours.

It is perhaps true after all that the social and religious comments of Redburn's narrator are excessively bitter, even morbid. This is not to say, however, that these qualities of the narrative are artistically unjustifiable. If the older Redburn seems to have no more patience with the world's evil than his youthful counterpart, it is because he has as yet discovered no sign that the evil can be cured or even relieved effectively. Seemingly, the relentless pressure of the world upon the individual allows no interval in which the psychic wounds caused by youth's entry into adulthood can heal: "they strike in too deep, and leave such a scar that the air of Paradise might not erase it."[1] The only action of which Redburn now seems capable is that of warning men that they must become aware not only that physical and moral evil surrounds them but that it threatens them, that it inheres in them. Thus if his voice at times takes on the shrill character of the Old Testament prophets, it is because he has accepted the role of prophet and has discovered with his predecessors how difficult it is to convince men that "with the poor and desolate, grief is no indulgence of mere sentiment, however, sincere, but a growing reality in their vital beings."[2]

Redburn seems to be in part a projection of Melville, not only in his biographical background but in his preoccupation with evil and in his feeling that, after several years of adulthood, he had accomplished nothing significant. If this assessment of him is correct, he provides us with a clear indication of the drift of Melville's mind at the time of the book's composition. For in the character of Redburn, Melville successfully objectified the monomania in himself that he would again portray and try to exorcise in Ahab. Redburn, like Ahab, sees all too clearly the evil of the world and the suffering which it inflicts on man. Redburn, like Ahab, tries to assimilate all of mankind's agony and to express it in a meaningful way. Redburn, like Ahab, feels an overwhelming sense of helplessness before a world in which the only stable order is the persistence of disorder. Melville must have felt similar emotions welling up in him, particularly after the failure of _Mardi_. He must also have recognized the need for a way to translate vision into action somwhere between Redburn's futile crying in the wilderness (which he knew from his first three books would go unheeded) and the equally vain fury that he would portray in Ahab. So, while continuing to deepen his understanding of art, the weapon he would use in a last-ditch effort to ward off the impending Apocalypse which was to be _Pierre_, Melville made one final attempt to find in religion hope that some power higher than man could bring order to human life.

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[1] Redburn, pp. 11-12. [2] Ibid., p. 375.

White-Jacket

If for the most part religion lurked in the background of _Redburn_ as an unfulfilled possibility, it is brought to the very center of _White-Jacket_ and made to demonstrate what power it has to make human existence meaningful. The religious implications of Redburn's life history were too far-reaching, too compelling not to be explored further; and Melville's voyage on the _United States_, aside from being the kind of adventure that the public apparently enjoyed, must have seemed to him a perfect vehicle for further religious speculation. First of all he could create from a large American military vessel (in his day, as in ours, a floating city) a literal microcosm, an actual rather than allegorical community of mankind. Life on the Neversink was apparently intended to represent human life in general, not in the variety of its manners and customs (the focus in Mardi) but in its essence. Secondly, Melville could depict through his narrator, White-Jacket, man's struggle to cope with, to overcome if possible, the conditions under which he is forced to conduct his life. Finally, he could derive from his materials a critique of Christianity which would help him to assess the power of its teachings to alter significantly the human situation. Artistically, Melville's achievement in these three areas is less than satisfactory; but the book is his most ambitious attempt to render the human situation in terms of the type of symbolism peculiar to Moby-Dick. Thus if White-Jacket is a failure in some ways, it is an interesting failure, not only because it taught Melville what to avoid in the composition of Moby-Dick but because its religious conclusions led him directly to his own confrontation with the White Whale.

White-Jacket is the first of three books in which Melville employed a ship as a microcosm, but in comparison to the Pequod in particular the Neversink fails to establish itself as a symbolic entity. Just as he would do in Moby-Dick, he tried in White-Jacket to construct a large foundation of "factual" description upon which to build an integral symbolic superstructure. The difference between his success in Moby-Dick and his relative lack of it in White-Jacket is both technical and intellectual. In the first place, Melville fails technically to integrate his symbolism with the factual base on which it is intended to rest. Life on the Pequod is rendered peculiarly interesting by the fact that it is so intertwined with the life of the mysterious whale. The stature of Moby Dick is increased rather than diminished by Melville's examination of the whale in general, just as the intensity with which the Pequod's crew hunt Moby Dick under Ahab's magnetic leadership is made more plausible by their reckless efficiency in the dangerous business of everyday whaling. But the sort of detail that reinforces the thematic progression of Moby-Dick diffuses much of the symbolic impact White-Jacket was intended to have. Melville could have engaged the Neversink in its intended business -- warfare -- and focused his attention on the violent nature of man's life. Instead, he chose to emphasize the struggle between man's freedom and the inherent limitations of human life by relating the philosophical problem to authoritarianism aboard a military vessel. But though Melville states that every aspect of life on the Neversink is dominated by military law, the book is too long and rambling to convey this sense of constant oppression. As a result the characters, officers and crew, are forced to be "symbolic" at one time and "realistic" at another, seldom both simultaneously.

The second problem with the ship-as-microcosm in White-Jacket is one of intellectual clarity. The subtitle of White-Jacket is The World in a Man-of-War. Throughout the book, however, Melville abandons this phraseology for the more significant "man-of-war's world." The last chapter of the book is proof enough, if proof is needed, that Melville intended this revised phrase to mean more than that the Neversink is a convenient community in which to study homo sapiens. Rather Melville is contending that the conditions on this particular ship, the Neversink, are parallel to those in the world which man must inhabit, that the universe itself is a "man-of-war's world." Such a one-to-one correlation, technically closer to allegory than to symbol, is absent in Moby-Dick. The crew of the Pequod may be an "Anacharsis Clootz" delegation sent forth to come to terms with the White Whale;

but one is forced to assume that of the crew only Ahab, Ishmael, and Starbuck have the slightest idea of _why_ the Whale is being sought. Thus the crew cannot be Man and the _Pequod_ the world. But this is precisely Melville's premise in _White-Jacket_, and it involves him in an artistic quandary from which he fails to escape.

Melville's problem becomes clear in his treatment of fate -- one of the major themes of the novel. Melville's use of the term "fate," always disturbingly vague, is perhaps most puzzling in _White-Jacket_ -- due primarily, I think, to the faulty construction of the book. As I have tried to demonstrate, Melville's attention in _Redburn_ had shifted from the cosmic problems he had investigated in _Mardi_ to the individual human lives in which those problems become terrible realities. This movement, continued in _White-Jacket_, is toward a philosophy of life centered around positive action, not only in the sphere of social reform but in the individual's attempt to achieve moral stability. Thus Melville's intention in _White-Jacket_ is twofold: to portray with honesty and clarity human life as it is and to examine religion as a means of manipulating that life to man's greatest possible benefit. The essence of the first subject -- man's condition -- Melville sums up in the word "fate."

Fate, as Melville contends in _Mardi_, is not identical with "necessity." In Melville's conception man is not predestined to a particular life. Rather he has a certain amount of freedom, but he is fated to exercise it within a system of severe limitations. Forces both external and internal impinge upon him constantly and prevent him from achieving all that the higher aspects of his nature promise that he can achieve. It is important to note that for Melville fate is not merely the cause of a single disastrous or fortunate incident which alters a man's life; rather it is the totality of man's condition, a totality we may call "evil" if we do not limit this concept to the category of moral evil. For is it not an evil world that dooms man to wander through a universe so infinitely complex that his intellect shrinks to insignificance before it? Is it not an evil world which raises man above the mindlessness of nature and yet fails to give him the power to control the propensity toward violence and destructiveness which he retains? Yet, despite all this talk of the "world" as the source of fate, Melville had discovered while writing Redburn the futility of considering fate as an abstraction. He had come to the conclusion that he expresses in White-Jacket: "Ourselves are Fate."[1] Man becomes his own fate in two ways. First of all he has the freedom, limited though it is, to take action against the forces that try to divest him of his manhood. Secondly, as Melville had begun to see clearly in Mardi and Redburn, man carries within him the seeds of his own destruction. Something in his nature, only vaguely characterized by the term "natural depravity," works against him. It is in White-Jacket, significantly, that Melville foresees his experience in Pierre: "It is no pleasing task, nor a thankful one, to dive into the souls of some men; but there are occasions when, to bring up mud from the bottom, reveals to us on what soundings we are, on what coast we adjoin."[2]

This is the human condition that Melville sought to represent by the Neversink, but he fails to make the reader believe both the portrayal and and what it symbolizes. One could make a theoretical case that Melville has perfectly identified the Neversink with his conception of fate. The Articles of War under which the warship sails represent the flaws of the world in general, such as the physical violence of nature. The cruelty and injustice of the Neversink's officers are to be equated with man's inherent evil instincts. Unfortunately, this interpretation must be imposed on the book; it is simply not borne out in the reading. For example, Melville's heavy propaganda barrage against the Articles of War robs them of any effective symbolic impact by treating them too baldly and too insistently as man-made. The officers of the Neversink fail as characters precisely where Ahab triumphs. In order to be effective representatives of man's predilection for self-destructiveness, they should possess the quality which lies somewhere between demonic immorality and admirable nobility that characterizes Ahab. Of course they have no such quality. They are not even well-developed villains; ultimately they degenerate into cogs in the system against which Melville fulminates.

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[1] Herman Melville, White-Jacket, edited by Hennig Cohen (New York, 1967), p. 321.

[2] Ibid., p. 207.

The failure of the Neversink officers to be both believable characters and symbolic entities in the microcosm Melville has tried to create is shared by Melville's hero White-Jacket. This does not mean that White-Jacket is without any character at all. Melville has obviously modeled him to be a tireless opponent of the system of injustice in force on the Neversink. He is an intelligent young man who glories in a night of conversation about the wisdom of the world and who feels that his position as main-top man allows him to "give such a free, broad, off-hand, bird's-eye, and, more than all, impartial account of our man-of-war's world."[1] More than his mental capacity, however, White-Jacket values his freedom. Even where his great friend Jack Chase is concerned, White-Jacket is jealous of his position as a free soul: "I thanked my sweet stars, that kind fortune had placed me near him, though under him, in the frigate."[1] Above all White-Jacket is appalled by the martial code and its application on the *Neversink*: "The whole body of this discipline is emphatically a system of cruel cogs and wheels, systematically grinding up in one common hopper all that might minister to the moral well-being of the crew."[2] Though he admires Jack Chase's ability to function within this system so smoothly and yet with such dignity, White-Jacket is not as easy in its grasp. He decides to follow the example of Nord who "had early resolved, so to conduct himself as never to run the risk of the scourge," even though White-Jacket realizes that Nord had become a "wandering recluse" as a consequence of his determination.[3] Melville's hero discovers, however, that part of man's fate is that he must not, upon pain of inconsolable grief, attempt completely to avoid communion with his fellow men, even though they may drag him to degradation or death: "it is quite impossible, I say, to live with five hundred of your fellow-beings, be they who they may, without feeling a common sympathy with them at the time, and ever after cherishing some sort of interest in their welfare."[4] It is a lesson that Ishmael is forced to learn aboard the *Pequod*.

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[1] White-Jacket, p. 46.

Despite White-Jacket's single-minded devotion to his freedom, however, his role in Melville's thematic and artistic scheme becomes more and more fragmented and finally disintegrates. Melville has supplied his narrator with all the traits necessary to fulfill that role, but he has failed to breathe into them the life which would make White-Jacket both a human being and a symbolic figure. This is not to say that his detestation of the Articles of War and particularly of flogging do not arise directly from his desire for freedom. His main argument against the scourge is that, like the authoritarian system of which it is a part, it robs man of his humanity: "You see a human being, stripped like a slave, scourged worse than a hound. And for what? For things not essentially criminal, but made so by arbitrary laws."[1] The Articles of War, he implies, turn men into animals precisely by undermining their "moral well-being."[2] White-Jacket's opposition to flogging even manages to become emotionally, not just intellectually, believable in his relation of old Ushant's beating and in the description of his own reaction to the Captain's order that he himself be flogged. The reader is caught up in these incidents; he feels the anger of the crew as an old man is beaten for resisting an arbitrary order; he actually experiences White-Jacket's suicidal desperation when faced with the scourge. Yet despite all this, the pages upon pages of argument against flogging, irritating as they may be coming from Melville, are in no way acceptable coming from White-Jacket. He never establishes the rapport with the reader that Ishmael achieves after the first three words of *Moby-Dick*. By selecting a broader canvas in *White-Jacket*, Melville sacrificed the intense focus on a single character that he had achieved in *Redburn*; and in doing so he also destroyed the reader's willingness to accept what *White-Jacket* says simply because *he* says it.

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[1] *White-Jacket*, p. 11 (italics mine). [2] *Ibid.*, p. 373.

[3] *Ibid.*, p. 50. [4] *Ibid.*, p. 172.

Melville's attempt to make White-Jacket a symbolic figure was no more fruitful than his intention to make him a credible spokesman for his creator's moral viewpoint. There is little doubt in the minds of most readers that Melville intended the white jacket to have some symbolic significance for the life of its owner and for the book as a whole. The jacket, originally thought by the narrator to be a triumph of sea-going usefulness, soon becomes a burden to him. Its many pockets, intended to hold scores of desirable items, act like the cells of a sponge and make the coat unfit for wear in the rain. Its bulkiness impedes White-Jacket's activities on the yardarm, a position in which maneuverability is vital. Its bright color, which he is not allowed to change, sets him apart from the crew and makes him a highly visible choice for unpleasant tasks. Eventually it causes him to fall overboard and, by virtue of its capacity for holding water, very nearly to drown. He saves himself by slashing the jacket with his knife, "as if I were ripping open myself."[1] It is clear that White-Jacket's action liberates him to some extent, that it frees him to establish a more intimate comradeship with his fellow men than he had previously allowed himself; but beyond this the significance of the scene is fuzzy.

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[1] *White-Jacket*, pp. 136-137. [2] *Ibid.*, p. 373.

Perhaps the reason that, despite the vividness of White-Jacket's narration of the incident, it lacks the thematic importance it was evidently intended to have is to be found in Leslie Fiedler's complaint that although White-Jacket's "re-emergence seems to represent a rebirth, there is no sense of the manner of life for which he has been redeemed. The plunge into the deep and the rising up remain an ending only, not a beginning."[2] The portrayal of young Redburn gains in intensity with the narrator's simultaneous revelation of the course of his life after the voyage to Liverpool. Not only do we see Ishmael change during the course of Moby-Dick, but he implies in his relation of the story what sort of man he has become. But no such biographical progression exists in White-Jacket: White-Jacket is a static character, a man with neither past nor future. And thus the jacket, as a symbol, is stillborn. The Moby Dick we see through Ishmael's eyes creates a world of meaning around himself; but the jacket, never very sturdy, ceases to exist as a viable symbol the second that White-Jacket cuts it open with his knife. And with the demise of the jacket, its owner dies as well; for unless we can accept White-Jacket as a man capable of developing through continued struggle with the circumstances of human life, he can have no real significance.

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[1] White-Jacket, p. 394. [2] Fiedler, Love and Death, p. 523.

Granted his lack of success in establishing the Neversink and White-Jacket both as real entities and as symbolic opponents in man's struggle to maintain his freedom and dignity in a world which threatens both, Melville's analysis of Christianity in White-Jacket was doomed to artistic failure. In fact the book's symbolic fuzziness obscures the tremendous importance of the religious thought in the novel. At first Melville's religious comments seem no different from those in Typee or Mardi. Neither his complaint that the minister aboard the Neversink is of no benefit to the sailors nor even his remarks on the un-Christian nature of war are anything new for him. But his overwhelming (and often irritating) concentration upon the contrast between the tenets of Christianity and the practice of Christians indicates that, even though his questioning of Christianity was proceeding in the same direction as it always had, it was now beginning to produce answers different from those it had produced in the first three books.

Melville never lost sight of the fact that Christ was supremely aware that man lives constantly threatened by accident, disease, poverty, and moral evil in others and in himself. Angered by what seemed to him blind optimism on Emerson's part, Melville wrote in the margin of his edition of Emerson: "To annihilate all this nonsense read the Sermon on the

Mount, and consider what it implies."[1] Indeed, Melville's long-standing hope in the Christian message was based in part on his belief that Christ, above all men, had fully appreciated both the dignity of man and the terrible threats that the world offered to that dignity. A major aspect of Christ's mission on earth, then, was to aid man in his struggle against the flaws in his world and in himself. And so in White-Jacket Melville insists, as he had before, that religion must be effective on earth, that its effects cannot remain hidden in the darkness of Divine Providence until the moment of death. He launches an extended and bitter attack on all forms of thought which assert that "evil was but good disguised";[2] and, having dismissed philosophy as "but a slough and a mire,"[3] he turns as always to religion. But never before have his conclusions upon analyzing the promise of Christianity been so grim. His use of elements of Christian morality in his propaganda against war and flogging in White-Jacket is so pervasive that more critics than Lawrance Thompson have found his stance disingenuous. There is no doubt that Melville's propagandizing was deliberate,[4] but the militant Christianity which accompanies it seems to have a cause deeper than a mere attempt to "brainwash" his contemporaries. The writing of Redburn had made Melville fear more than ever before that Christianity was failing in its mission. As he investigated this possibility in White-Jacket, he became more and more disturbed by what his creation revealed to him. He found a world at the mercy of men like Bland, in whom "wicked deeds seemed the legitimate operation of his whole infernal organization."[5] Certainly no religion could touch such a creature. At the opposite extreme he found a situation in which the Neversink's Captain drives to Sunday prayers a Baptist who does not wish to participate in the service of the Episcopalian minister.[1] There is nothing to choose from in this incident: on the one hand, the Captain has no right to interfere with the religious beliefs of another man; on the other, the sailor seems to violate the basic Christian injunction of brotherly love by refusing to join a fellow Christian in the worship of their common God.

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[1] Leyda, II, 648.

[2] White-Jacket, p. 184.

[3] Ibid., p. 185.

[4] See his letter of October 9, 1849, to R. H. Dana.

[5] White-Jacket, p. 187.

Melville's most appalling revelation concerns Christianity's relationship to the warlike nature of the Neversink. He insists that "the whole matter of war is a thing that smites common sense and Christianity in the face,"[2] and he evinces no surprise at the sailors' irreligion since it is unlikely that "the religion of peace should flourish in an oaken castle of war."[3] But what nearly drives him to despair is that, in some mysterious way, what is left of Christianity is flourishing in a "man-of-war's world." Somehow Christianity has learned to coexist with man's worst nature; the lion has lain down with the lamb in a way which perverts the prophecy:

> But it needs not dilate upon the pure, bubbling milk of human kindness, and Christian charity, and forgiveness of injuries which pervade this charming document [the Articles of War], so thoroughly imbued, as a Christian code, with the benignant spirit of the Sermon on the Mount. But as it is very nearly alike in the foremost states of Christendom, and as it is nationally set forth by those states, it indirectly becomes an index to the true condition of the present civilization of the world.[4]

"Christendom" -- the term Kierkegaard used for the stagnant residuum of Protestantism, the concept that Melville had often contrasted unfavorably with savagery -- suddenly became a terrifying reality for Melville. Not only have Christians managed over the centuries to add to the world's collective evil; they have constructed a system to perpetuate the forces which impede moral progress. In other words, Christianity has forgotten the example of its founder and has cooperated with the sinner rather than trying to change him. The presence of a chaplain aboard the Neversink, the perfect representative of large Christian nations, is a mere reminder of religion's support (even encouragement) of bloodshed, oppression, greed, lust, and ignorance throughout history.

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[1] White-Jacket, p. 155. [2] Ibid., p. 315. [3] Ibid., p. 156.

[4] Ibid., p. 293.

Melville's realization that Christianity as a religion is in complicity with the forces of evil in the world produces two reactions. First he angrily insists upon the continuing truth of Christ's teachings:

> Say on, say on; but know you this, and lay it to heart, war-voting Bench of Bishops, that He on whom we believe himself has enjoined us to turn the left cheek if the right be smitten. Never mind what follows. That passage you cannot expunge from the Bible; that passage is as binding upon us as any other; that passage embodies the soul and substance of the Christian faith; without it, Christianity were like any other faith. And that passage will yet, by the blessing of God, turn the world. But in some things we must turn Quaker first.[1]

Melville cannot maintain this defiant confidence, however. The memory of Christ is not enough; unless Christ is active in the contemporary world, as Paul said, our faith is vain. And Melville was too conscious of the extent of unrelieved human suffering and of the depth of the evil in the hearts of men to believe that the relatively few men who are transformed by Christ's message offered much hope for the future. His conclusion was, for him, inevitable:

> Ah! the best righteousness of our man-of-war world seems but an

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[1] White-Jacket, p. 321.

> unrealized ideal, after all; and those maxims which, in the hope of bringing about a Millennium, we busily teach to the heathen, we Christians ourselves disregard. In view of the whole present social frame-work of our world, so ill adapted to the practical adoption of the meekness of Christianity, there seems almost some ground for the thought, that although our blessed Savior was full of the wisdom of heaven, yet his gospel seems lacking in the practical wisdom of earth -- in a due appreciation of the necessities of nations at times demanding bloody massacres and wars; in a proper estimation of the value of rank, title, and money.[1]

This passage, of course, is a bitter attack on the gap between Christian doctrine and Christian practice; in an indirect, ironic way, however, it is also a tentative statement of the opinion that Christianity as a body of wisdom and a means of communication with God is a failure.

By itself, this comment might seem insignificant, but it is accompanied in White-Jacket by other evidence that Melville's mind was moving closer and closer to an acceptance of what was to him a harsh reality. Christ had failed in his mission in two ways: His teachings did not have sufficient allure to change men's hearts on their own merits, and the communion between God and man which would give humanity the strength to be truly Christian had not been established. Thus the belief expressed in the last chapter of White-Jacket that "Our Lord High Admiral will yet interpose" to right present and future wrongs is not insincere; it is merely beside the point. The most pertinent message in this somewhat bitter last chapter is one neither of patience nor of despair. There is none of the ranting at God for man's lot that many critics have assumed was Melville's usual attitude. Earlier in the book he had espoused the pragmatic view that he had moved toward in Redburn: "What we call Fate is even, heartless, and impartial; not a fiend to kindle bigot flames, nor a philanthropist to espouse the cause of Greece. We may fret, fume, and fight; but the thing we call Fate everlastingly sustains an armed neutrality."[1] Now he repeats his warning: "For the rest, whatever befall us, let us never train our murderous guns inboard; let us not mutiny with bloody pikes in our hands."[2] Faced with a situation that he cannot control completely, man must avoid the suicidal desperation of White-Jacket (and eventually of Ahab). He must concentrate his energies upon the one aspect of the universe that he has a chance to change -- himself: "From the last ills no man can save another; therein each man must be his own saviour."[3] No longer can man hope to find outside of his world the answer to it. No longer can he look to a remote God who has abandoned him, at least temporarily, just as He abandoned Christ on the cross. If man is to transcend himself he must do it through himself: "Thus sailing under sealed orders, we ourselves are the repositories of the secret packet, whose mysterious contents we long to learn. There are no mysteries outside of ourselves."[4]

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[1] White-Jacket, pp. 324-325.

If I have stressed the negative aspects of White-Jacket, it is because they lead directly to Melville's positive achievement in Moby-Dick. The dual stream of Melville's art and his religious thought had reached high tide by 1850. He had attempted an intense examination of character in Redburn and then broadened his scope to include both detail and symbol in White-Jacket. It is well known that he was dissatisfied with both attempts, but it is important to know the precise nature of his frustration. Melville wrote to his father-in-law about the two books: "And while I have felt obliged to refrain from writing the kind of book I would wish to; yet, in writing these two books, I have not repressed myself much -- so far as _they_ are concerned; but have spoken pretty much as I feel."[1] This statement is not a denial on Melville's part of the importance of _Redburn_ and _White-Jacket_ for his religious thought as well as for his progression toward the technical mastery of his art. Rather, it reveals that Melville felt restricted less by his reader's moral attitudes than by the literary context in which they allowed him to express himself. In other words the kind of book that would sell, no matter how much it was criticized by the religious or the moralistic, was the personal adventure narrative. But within this type of structure he had not been able to combine the tremendous intensity of his vision with a "fable" strong and broad enough to sustain it. Now, having come to the dual conclusion that religion is of no use to man in this world and that man must be his own guide, and having been encouraged by the example of Hawthorne, Melville was ready to abandon the form of his past "successes" and give free rein to his imagination. In doing so he achieved, in _Moby-Dick_, a successful fusion of the craftsmanship he had learned in several painful experiments and the religious thought which had been moving toward a climax throughout his whole adult life.

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[1] White-Jacket, p. 321. [2] Ibid., pp. 400-401.

[3] Ibid., p. 400. [4] Ibid., p. 394.

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[1] _Letters_, pp. 91-92.

Chapter V

THE TOPMOST GRIEF:

REJECTION OF AHAB'S FAITH

What may man know?
(Here pondered Clarel) let him rule --
Pull down, build up, creed, system, school,
And reason's endless battle wage,
Make and remake his verbiage --
But solve the world! Scarce that he'll do:
Too wild it is, too wonderful.
Since _this_ world, then can baffle so --
Our natural harbor -- it were strange
If _that_ alleged, which is afar,
Should not confound us when we range
In revery where its problems are.

(_Clarel_, IV, iii, 109-120.)

In late 1849 and 1850 Herman Melville was a restless man. He had written two novels in less than a year's time, but his letter to Lemuel Shaw on October 6, 1849, shows that he was clearly dissatisfied with both: "But no reputation that is gratifying to me, can possibly be achieved by either of these books . . . . So far as I am individually concerned, & independent of my pocket, it is my earnest desire to write those sort of books which are said to 'fail.' -- Pardon this egotism."[1] In the light of this desire, Melville may have intended that the voyage upon which he was to embark five days later should provide him with more than just an opportunity to sell White-Jacket to Bentley and to see some of Europe. Perhaps he hoped to find across the Atlantic the impulse to flaunt convention, ignore his financial situation, and write the kind of book he had not written in Redburn and White-Jacket. Whether he received any such inspiration or not is conjectural. His tour was cut short by a lack of funds, and loneliness for his family drove him from England on Christmas of 1849. But George Adler, the man with whom Melville loved to talk philosophy, found another reason for his early return to America:

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[1] _Letters_, pp. 91-92.

> I regretted his departure very much; but all I could do to check and fix his restless mind for a while at least was of no avail. His loyalty to his friends at home and the instinctive impulse of his imagination to assimilate and perhaps to work up into some beautiful chimaeras . . . the materials he had already gathered in his travels, would not allow him to prolong his stay.[1]

All we know for sure is that Melville began a new novel soon after his arrival home and that on May 1, 1850, he told Richard Henry Dana, Jr., that he was "half way in the work."[2] On June 27 of the same year, he wrote Richard Bentley to say that the book would be ready "the latter part of the coming autumn."[3]

The whaling novel of which Melville wrote to Dana and Bentley was never finished, or if finished it was never published. Despite the exhaustive research and reasonable speculation of such critics as Howard Vincent, Leon Howard, and George Stewart about the genesis of Moby-Dick, we will never know with certainty what the original book was like. Melville described it to Bentley as a "romance of adventure, founded upon certain wild legends in the Southern Sperm Whale Fisheries, and illustrated by the author's own personal experience."[1] Apparently this "strange sort of book" (as he portrayed it to Dana)[2] already had some of the mythic aura that pervades the finished product. But almost certainly it was closer to Melville's previous adventure narratives than it was to Moby-Dick. Then a change took place. That is clearly indicated by certain remnants of a revised story in the completed novel[3] and by the difference of more than a year between the time Melville promised Bentley a new book and the publication of Moby-Dick in October of 1851. As he had in Mardi, Melville found himself writing a new book before he could finish the one he had begun.

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[1] Leyda, I, 343.

[2] Letters, p. 108.

[3] Ibid., p. 109.

The most obvious source for Melville's new impetus was his friendship with Nathaniel Hawthorne. Melville spent the summer of 1850 in Hawthorne's neighborhood at Pittsfield, but he became closely acquainted with at least some of his works before he knew the man well. Those who criticize Melville's rapturous "Hawthorne and His Mosses" as a blatant self-projection and who point to the rather tortured friendship of the two men as proof of their contention have some reason on their side. There is no doubt that Melville's excitement over Hawthorne's work was caused largely by the fact that he found there precisely what he had been looking for (which is not to say that it was not there to begin with). For Melville's conception of truth had changed again. Having first defined truth in terms of factuality and then as fidelity to the individual's inner vision, Melville now defined truth as "what men don't want to hear." "But Truth," he wrote Hawthorne in June, 1851, "is the silliest thing under the sun. Try to get a living by the Truth -- and go to the Soup Societies. Heavens! Let any clergyman try to preach the Truth from its very stronghold, the pulpit, and they would ride him out of his church on his own pulpit bannister."[1] What Melville found to his joy in Mosses from an Old Manse was that Hawthorne was not afraid to speak the truth that men want to avoid. Melville's comparison of Hawthorne with Shakespeare, which seems ridiculous today, sprang from this very quality in the two men. In the "Mosses" essay Melville says of Shakespeare that through "the mouths of the dark characters of Hamlet, Timon, Lear, and Iago, he craftily says, or sometimes insinuates the things, which we feel to be so terrifically true, that it were all but madness for any good man, in his own proper character, to utter, or even hint of them."[2] Strangely enough, it mattered little to Melville that Hawthorne's readers missed his dark meanings, though Melville chided them for it. It was enough that Hawthorne had spoken the truth, whether anyone heard it or not. And Hawthorne's magic, whether partially created by Melville or not, had its effect. In the middle of 1851 Melville wrote to Hawthorne: "I have come to regard this matter of Fame as the most transparent of all vanities . . . . I did not think of Fame, a year ago, as I do now."[3] Melville was ready to say what he thought, no matter who listened, no matter who was offended.

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[1] Letters, p. 109. [2] Ibid., p. 108.

[3] George R. Stewart, "The Two Moby-Dicks," American Literature, XXV (January, 1954), 417-448.

If Hawthorne's example provided Melville with the immediate impulse to change his half-written book, a more basic source for the final form of the novel lay in the materials Melville had chosen. As I pointed out in the last chapter, Melville had come very close in White-Jacket to a direct denial of the ability of religion to serve man's deepest needs. The vital importance of such a concept to a man as instinctively religious as Melville, in conjunction with his dissatisfaction with the two books that had most directly brought him to accept it, contributed heavily to what was apparently a powerful drive to begin a new book. His financial needs were a motivating force as well, however; and, in an attempt to satisfy both himself and the public, he was forced to turn again to his own experiences. It was nearly inevitable, then, that the book begun early in 1850 would concern whaling. The choice, if indeed it was a choice, was more propitious than Melville could have dreamed. Just as the implications of Yillah (who had originally been a romantic gift to his wife and sister) helped transform Mardi into an outpouring of Melville's deepest soul, the confrontation of man, sea, and whale must have begun to loom in his mind as the perfect setting for the resolution of his religious conflicts. In fact, on the basis of Melville's instinctive use of religious imagery and allegory, we may assume that the book began to alter itself without Melville's conscious cooperation, that before he realized it fully it had changed the implications of White-Jacket into firm conclusions.

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[1] Letters, p. 127. [2] "Mosses," pp. 541-542.

[3] Letters, p. 130.

It was at this point that certain aspects of his subject matter must have struck Melville forcibly. In his last three books he had dealt with man in society and slowly had come to the conclusion that the misfortune inflicted upon mankind by chance or physical nature and the moral evil which men themselves engender are of a piece, no matter whether they were implanted in creation by the perverse disobedience of Adam and Eve or by a malicious or indifferent God. The fact is that the mixture of beauty and appalling force in nature is mirrored in the very deepest essence of man's being. To search into the forces of the universe is no different than to probe into the recesses of man's nature; both acts can be very frustrating and very dangerous. And Melville must have seen that a whaling voyage provided the perfect stage for just such a dual confrontation. The Manx sailor is correct when he points to the horizon as an appropriate ring for the fight between Daggoo and the Spaniard.[1] Take man from the institutions and place him on the wild, beautiful, violent sea; then you will see how close he can be to brute nature and perhaps how far from it he can be as well.

Moreover, as he looked back upon his own experiences, Melville seems to have recognized that the object of the Pequod's hunt, the powerful, mysterious whale, could represent all that was beautiful, terrifying, and baffling both in nature and in man's soul. Speaking of his attempt to catalogue whales, Ishmael confesses:

> To grope down into the bottom of the sea after them; to have one's hands among the unspeakable foundations, ribs, and very pelvis of the world; this is a fearful thing. What am I that I should essay to hook the nose of this leviathan! The awful tauntings in Job might well appal me. "Will he" (the leviathan) "make a covenant with thee? Behold the hope of him is vain!"[2]

And if the whale can symbolize the essential mysteries of life, then are not whalers the image of man coming to grips with the forces, known and unknown, which surround him? "[O]f all sailors, [whalers] are by all odds the most directly brought into contact with whatever is appallingly astonishing in the sea; face to face they not only eye its greatest marvels, but, hand to jaw, give battle to them."[3]

Melville had found in the whaling voyage the symbolic complex that he had been searching for, the total interaction of the world of experience and the world of imagination, of "fact" and "meaning." Here he found the Sea -- wild, unbounded, the medium of quest; here he found Man -- free, bold, insatiable in his desire for meaning; and here he found the Whale -- the mystery, the hunted and hunter, the end and the beginning of the quest. Here before him lay man's world in all its fullness, the reality which he had been attempting to fathom and portray from Typee to White-Jacket. And it was a world without a God; for by the time he began to rewrite the book, he seems to have decided, reluctantly, that neither a remote Father nor an idealistic but ineffectual Son could have any real place in the immediate concerns of man's life and that an attempt to give them a place could be disastrous. He wrote to Hawthorne in April, 1851: "As soon as you say Me, a God, a Nature, so soon you jump off from your stool and hang from the beam."[1] "The Lee Shore," the chapter in which Melville somewhat awkwardly disposes of Bulkington, a character who was apparently to play a major role in the original whaling novel,[2] is a farewell in two senses. It is a dismissal of the old book, of the catering to public tastes, of the hesistancy to speak the "mortally intolerable truth."[3] But it is also a farewell to the old Melville, to the man whose attempt to keep "the open independence of [the] sea" had resulted in his religious death.[4] Finally, it is a greeting and a word of encouragement to the new Melville, who has abandoned all hope of religion's comfort:

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[1] Moby-Dick, p. 154. [2] Ibid., p. 118. [3] Ibid., p. 156.

> But as in landlessness alone resides the highest truth, shoreless, indefinite as God -- so, better is it to perish in that howling infinite, than be ingloriously dashed upon the lee, even if that were safety! For worm-like, then, oh! who would craven crawl to land! Terrors of the terrible! is all this agony so vain? Take heart, take heart, O Bulkington! Bear thee grimly, demigod! Up from the spray of thy ocean-perishing -- straight up, leaps thy apotheosis![5]

Melville hoped that in his portrayal of the dangers of the religious point of view and the creation of a viable alternative to it he would find his own apotheosis.

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[1] Letters, p. 125. [2] Stewart, p. 424. [3] Moby-Dick, p. 97.

[4] Ibid. [5] Ibid., pp. 97-98.

It is difficult to discuss the first part of Melville's design -- his effective rejection of religion -- without making it appear that Moby-Dick is a carefully structured philosophical thesis; but anyone who has read the book knows that this is not the impression it conveys. Melville's own hope that it would not be treated as "a hideous and intolerable allegory" was a serious one.[1] He had constructed a real world in Moby-Dick, a world as palpable as that of any whaler but richer in significance than "ordinary" life appears to be. In the last analysis Ahab, Starbuck, Queequeg, Ishmael, and Moby Dick do not "stand" for anything. Rather they are real beings acting out with eternal verity man's struggle with himself and his environment to make human existence more truly human. Melville's portrayal of the way in which religion not only fails man in this struggle but actually works against him at times is a single but integral part of the large thematic pattern. To separate this aspect of the book from the others necessarily warps the form that Melville created. But the fact is that, aside from their other qualities and functions in the novel, the major characters in Moby-Dick who have any religious attitudes at all are living examples of the inefficacy of the religious principle in human life (Ishmael excluded).[2]

Melville begins his examination of religion in Moby-Dick where he had begun his career five years before -- with a cannibal from the South Sea islands. And in his portrayal of Queequeg we have a clear indication of the scope of Melville's rejection of religion and of the meaning of the term "religion" itself with regard to Moby-Dick. For in Queequeg's story we find that the identity of the God or gods being discussed at any time is unimportant. Whether Yojo is nothing more than a bit of wood or a living rival to the Presbyterian God, whether the God that Ahab defies is that of the Calvinists or the Gnostics, whether Fedallah serves Jehovah or Satan, whether "God" is a living being or merely a concept -- all this makes no difference. Though Melville had been led to his judgment of religion through an examination of Christianity, his conclusion is not restricted to one faith. He has decided that the most basic religious premise -- that there is a God who has power to influence human lives and thus bears some living, actual relationship to man -- is not a useful one upon which to base the moral life. It is not even important whether God is really active in history. Since man cannot know for sure how or even if God directs his life, it is futile for him to guide his actions by an assumed understanding of Divine Will. Therefore it is religion in general -- "me, a God, a Nature" -- that Melville exposes in Moby-Dick as false to mankind's best interests.

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[1] Moby-Dick, p. 177.

[2] In the following discussion I will avoid as much as possible Ishmael's personal commentary on religion and concentrate on the factual description and self-revelation of the characters, assuming that in this way I can approach most closely to Melville's own attitude as he expressed it in the book. Ishmael himself I will discuss as Melville's alternative to Ahab in Chapter VI.

Who is this cannibal prince who first introduces the reader to the failure of religion? Primarily, he is a good man. Despite his contact with civilization, he retains much of the spiritual freedom, dignity, and exuberance of the savage: "He looked like a man who had never cringed and never had had a creditor."[1] As for his morality, Melville characteristically compares him favorably with most Christians. His cannibalism and his habit of peddling shrunken heads on the open market mean little more to Melville than would the horribly disfigured face of a basically kindly man. For essentially, Queequeg is more humane, more loving than many "civilized" Christians. He recognizes that "It's a mutual, joint-stock world, in all meridians. We cannibals must help these Christians."[1] Even Queequeg is disappointed with the results of his investigation of the Western world, which he had hoped would yield him the secret of great happiness:

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[1] Moby-Dick, p. 52.

> But, alas! the practices of whalemen soon convinced him that even Christians could be both miserable and wicked; infinitely more so, than all his father's heathens. Arrived at last in old Sag Harbor; and seeing what the sailors did there; and then going on to Nantucket, and seeing how they spent their wages in that place also, poor Queequeg gave it up for lost. Thought he, it's a wicked world in all meridians; I'll die a pagan.[2]

Despite his virtues, however, Queequeg represents a way of life that Melville cannot accept. First of all, his religious views are untenable as far as Melville is concerned. His blind faith in Yojo, his little ebony idol, is touching but useless. Despite his offerings of biscuit, despite his arduous fast (a practice which even the Serenians eschewed), Queequeg's god fails him. He trusts it to help Ishmael pick a ship for them both, and once the choice has been made he is sure that it is a good one. But if the Fate that guides Ishmael to choose the Pequod is personal and purposeful in its actions, then it has done Queequeg no favor in leading him to a violent death. And if Ishmael's choice is an accident or a mere act of fallible human judgment, then of what use are the offerings and the fast? The fact is that neither Queequeg nor Ishmael knows whether any supra-human force has manipulated their lives.

Since the outcome of the Pequod's voyage could not have been predicted in any case, regardless of the basis for Ishmael's choice, Queequeg's faith in Yojo is not particularly harmful to him. More important is the fact that Queequeg's religious beliefs do not make him more human than he would have been without them. They have not instilled in him what Melville considers vital for human life -- moral awareness. As Ishmael says of Queequeg's rescue of the bumpkin who earlier had irritated him, "Was there ever such unconsciousness?"[1] Strictly speaking, Queequeg is neither good nor evil. He acts instinctively, emotionally rather than with the full powers of intellect and will brought into play. It was precisely the unpredictable nature of primitive man that apparently unnerved Melville in his contact with the islanders. If the~~ir~~ affection for others was free from the restricting conventions of civilization, their inherent aggressiveness was equally unfettered. In other words, the savage offered no hope to a man searching, as Melville was, for a way to bring meaning to an apparently meaningless world. For Melville had decided that man must bring order into being himself and that to do this he must be able effectively to harness the chaotic forces within him. Ultimately moral order, artistic order, and cosmic order become identical. But Queequeg, even supported by his religion, has not taken a single step toward such a goal. Despite his attractiveness, he does not measure up to Melville's standards of full humanity; his religious beliefs have done nothing to help him move through the intricate moral world of Ahab with any awareness of the dangers it poses.

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[1] Moby-Dick, p. 61.

[2] Ibid., p. 57.

As he had done in his earlier fiction, Melville turns in Moby-Dick from the savage to the Christian in order to judge the latter's answer to a world of disorder. The tone of his judgment is foreshadowed by the first reference to Christianity in the book. Ishmael opens a strange door in search of an inn.

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[1] Moby-Dick, p. 61.

> it seemed the great Black Parliament sitting in Tophet. A hundred black faces turned round in their rows to peer; and beyond, a black Angel of Doom was beating a book in a pulpit. It was a negro church; and the preacher's text was about the blackness of darkness, and the weeping and wailing and teeth-gnashing there. Ha, Ishmael, muttered I, backing out, Wretched entertainment at the sign of "The Trap!"[1]

The latent horror of this scene, the Christians' helpless and almost instinctive awe of evil and its effects, are an indication of Christianity's inability to overpower the chaotic forces present in man and his world. The same message is conveyed in a satirical way in Ishmael's discussion of the bloody violence in the life of the hypocritical Quaker, Captain Bildad.

> How now in the contemplative evening of his days, the pious Bildad reconciled these things in the reminiscence, I do not know, but it did not seem to concern him much, and very probably he had long since come to the sage and sensible conclusion that a man's religion is one thing, and this practical world quite another.[2]

Bildad is a living example of the doubt Melville expressed in White-Jacket that Christianity could ever influence the daily life of the majority of men.

Melville is not content, however, with fleeting glimpses of Christianity in action. Moby-Dick provides us with two major representatives of the religion in Father Mapple, the New Bedford preacher, and Starbuck, the first mate of the Pequod. At first glance Father Mapple appears to be the ideal clergyman as described in Redburn. He is a retired whaleman who knows the ways of his congregation. He maintains the dress of the seaman, and the chapel is decorated in a fashion intended to make the sailors feel at ease. His eloquent sermon is couched in the language of the sea. But even before Father Mapple's arrival there are hints that his ministry is less successful than one might expect. The sight which greets Ishmael in the chapel is chilling: "Each silent worshipper seemed purposely sitting apart from the other, as if each silent grief were insular and incommunicable . . . . [A]nd there these silent islands of men and women sat steadfastly eyeing several marble tablets, with black borders, masoned into the wall on either side of the pulpit."[1] The violence of the sea has left its mark on both chapel and worshippers, and Father Mapple's creed seems neither to have erased the grief and fear from the hearts of the living nor have united the congregation in their common fate. In the light of this fact, there is irony evident in Ishmael's comment that the chapel's prow-like pulpit is meaningful because "[f]rom thence it is the storm of God's quick wrath is first descried . . . . From thence it is the God of breezes fair or foul is first invoked for favorable winds."[2]

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[1] Moby-Dick, p. 18. [2] Ibid., p. 72.

Father Mapple's entrance into his pulpit by a rope ladder is another indication of Melville's attitude toward him. Again Ishmael comments:

> Can it be, then, that by that act of physical isolation, he signifies his spiritual withdrawal for the time, from all outward worldly ties and connexions? Yes, for replenished with the meat and wine of the word, to the faithful man of God, this pulpit, I see, is a self-containing strong-hold -- a lofty Ehrenbreitstein, with a perennial well of water within the walls.[3]

This attempt by Ishmael to fathom the significance of Father Mapple's action should seem discordant to one who has been following the course of Melville's religious thought. It is religion's tendency to retreat into a "strong-hold" of doctrine and Scripture and its failure to come to grips with the harsh realities of man's world that Melville has criticized in the books preceding Moby-Dick. Father Mapple enters into the chapel drenched with rain from a coastal squall to preach God's word and to promise great rewards in the afterlife for those who adhere to it; but outside storms both natural and man-made are drowning men by the thousands, and in their agony what to them are heavenly delights? In the hymn that Father Mapple sings, Jonah says, "In black distress, I called my God, / When I could scarce believe him mine,"[1] but goes on to affirm that God did indeed deliver him; yet the Liverpool poor, Harry Bolton, Jackson, and even Redburn received no answer to their cries of pain and confusion.

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[1] Moby-Dick, p. 39. [2] Ibid., p. 44. [3] Ibid., p. 43.

If the implications of Father Mapple's ministerial manner contradict Melville's religious ideas, the clergyman's sermon is even more unacceptable. Stated briefly, it is Father Mapple's thesis that the answer to the world's evil is the complete submission of man's will to God's: "But all the things that God would have us do are hard for us to do -- remember that -- and hence, he oftener commands us than endeavors to persuade. And if we obey God, we must disobey ourselves; and it is in this disobeying ourselves, wherein the hardness of obeying God consists."[2] Man, says Father Mapple, must accept as a just punishment for his sins whatever physical or moral hardship befalls him, just as Jonah does: "He leaves all his deliverance to God, contenting himself with this, that spite of all his pains and pangs, he will still look towards His holy temple. And here, shipmates, is true and faithful repentance; not clamorous for pardon, but grateful for punishment."[3] It is not likely that Melville, who had decried slavish subservience to God in Mardi, could accept it in Moby-Dick. His mood during the writing of the latter book is revealed not only by the sermon but by a well-known letter to Hawthorne in April of 1851 in which he praises "the man who, like Russia or the British Empire, declares himself a sovereign nature (in himself) amid the powers of heaven, hell, and earth. He may perish; but so long as he exists he insists upon treating with all Powers upon an equal basis."[1] Only two months later Melville tells Hawthorne that he thinks the use of the initial capital in the pronoun referring to God is "a slight dash of flunkeyism."[2] Essentially he refuses to accept Father Mapple's emphasis on man's willing obedience not to teachings but to absolute commands because such slavishness stifles the spontaneous impulses for good upon which Melville believes most men are capable of acting. He has insisted again and again that virtue cannot be imposed by command from without, that man must be led to it gently and allowed to feel its stirrings within him. Moreover, Father Mapple's insistence that obedience to God is disobedience to self, by making human nature appear essentially evil, implies that man is incapable of willing or doing good at all. This, as pessimistic as he is at times, Melville cannot accept.

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[1] Moby-Dick, p. 44. [2] Ibid., p. 45. [3] Ibid., p. 49.

There is an even deeper objection than these to Father Mapple's views, one which links him with Ahab. Critics have long seen that Father Mapple's sermon is of great significance to the themes of Moby-Dick, and many of them have concluded that the sermon is a condemnation of Ahab's action. This interpretation is based on the assumption, a false one I think, that since Ahab's position toward God and religion is not totally acceptable to Melville he employs a more orthodox faith to counteract Ahab's apostasy. But Father Mapple is not a judgment upon Ahab; Ahab is a judgment upon Father Mapple. For ultimately there is little to distinguish the two men. Sufficient proof of this contention can be found in excerpts from the thunderous peroration of Father Mapple's sermon:

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[1] Letters, pp. 124-125.

[2] Ibid., p. 129.

> Woe to him who seeks to please rather than to appal! Woe to him who would not be true, even though to be false were salvation! . . . Delight is to him -- a far, far upward, and inward delight -- who against the proud gods and commodores of this earth, ever stands forth his own inexorable self. Delight is to him whose strong arms yet support him, when the ship of this base treacherous world has gone down beneath him. Delight is to him, who gives no quarter in the truth, and kills, burns, and destroys all sin, though he pluck it out from under the robes of Senators and Judges.[1]

The confident self-righteousness and moral absolutism of this exhortation is perfectly parallel to Ahab's own. And the Captain goes only one step beyond Father Mapple (though admittedly a very large step) when he proposes to find evil in the courts of the Deity Himself.

The characteristic which Father Mapple and Ahab share and which Melville repudiates in Moby-Dick is moral and religious certainty. In each man, however, the trait takes a different course, a course indicated by his conception of the ultimate meaning of the whale. Father Mapple's sermon concerns Jonah's whale, a beast that, throughout his works and particularly in Moby-Dick, Melville condemns as a fairy tale creation. Rather, he is interested in Job's whale, a living reality employed by God to symbolize the elements of creation which must remain eternally mysterious to man. But Father Mapple, in his religious confidence, prefers to use as an object of meditation a whale totally subject to God's manipulation, a creation no more impressive than the "species of magnified mouse" that Flask takes him to be.[2] Likewise, though Moby Dick looms large on Ahab's horizon, the whale is a simple entity to the Captain. Whether an agent of pure evil or a "pasteboard mask" that veils a more powerful adversary, Moby Dick lacks the manifold significance in Ahab's eyes that he has for Ishmael and the reader.

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[1] Moby-Dick, pp. 50-51.

[2] Ibid., p. 106.

In their distinct ways, then, Father Mapple and Ahab are equally monomanic. They share the assumptions that God exists, that He has power to influence our lives and exercises it, and that He must be dealt with by all men. From these premises, Father Mapple concludes that God is the source of order and meaning and that man has no choice but to serve His will. Ahab, on the other hand, decides that God is the source of violence and disorder and that man's dignity consists in defying His will. From this point onward these opposite viewpoints become nearly indistinguishable. Both men feel that they are burdened with the responsibility of leading men toward their highest destiny. Both see their task as that of struggling against and destroying evil wherever it exists. Both are sure that to abandon their appointed duty would be to sell their souls, to deny their deepest human dignity. Both feel that the reward of their struggle -- whether it be heaven or the glory of having defied an all-powerful, vindictive foe -- is assured them. And so, despite the polarity of their attitudes toward the nature of God, Father Mapple and Ahab react to the maddening complexity of the world with a simplistic faith. Each is confident that his view is the only correct one, and perhaps one of them _is_ correct. But, as the saying has it, only God knows for sure -- and perhaps the men whose names are engraved on the tablets in the New Bedford chapel.

Starbuck is a perfect example of a "good man, and a pious,"[1] lost in a world where faith is not enough, where the voice of God -- so audible to Jonah -- is stilled. In a way the tragedy of Starbuck is the final condemnation of Father Mapple and Ahab, for in him the fallacy of their religious point of view is made most evident. Starbuck represents a type of

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[1] _Moby-Dick_, p. 93.

Christianity far different from that of Father Mapple. In the land-sea imagery of Moby-Dick, Starbuck is a man of the land. In other words his values, and his virtues, are those of the heart. He has no love for the reckless and unnecessary whaling exploits of Flask or the relentless intellectual pursuits of Ahab. His way of life is circumscribed by "careful" whaling techniques at sea, the security of the family hearthstone on land, and a simple, trusting religious faith. Starbuck looks to God as a provident, merciful Deity who watches over those who trust in Him. This God is not one who commands men to be other than they are but who enjoins them to try, despite their failings, to do good as best they can.

Starbuck's religious attitude is one which, in times past, would have appealed to Melville. If he could not have been as confident of the workings of Providence as Starbuck, at least he would have approved of the recognition of man's freedom, dignity, and goodness implicit in the mate's beliefs. But now, in Moby-Dick, Melville shows himself convinced that even such a faith as this is woefully inadequate and misleading in a world like ours. Ishmael emphasizes the fact that Starbuck is brave. Made cautious by his love of wife and child as well as by his conscientious approach to his duty, says Ishmael, Starbuck overcomes his fears by the exercise of simple, naked courage. Starbuck, unfortunately, has a tragic flaw.

> But it was not in reasonable nature that a man so organized, and with such terrible experiences and remembrances as he had; it was not in nature that these things should fail in latently engendering an element in him, which, under suitable circumstances, would break out from its confinement, and burn all his courage up. And brave as he might be, it was that sort of bravery, chiefly visible in some intrepid men, which while generally abiding firm in the conflict with seas, or winds, or whales, or any of the ordinary irrational horrors of the world, yet cannot withstand those more terrific, because more spiritual terrors, which sometimes menace you from the concentrating brow of an enraged and mighty man.[1]

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[1] Moby-Dick, p. 104.

Starbuck, then, has merely assumed the invulnerability of his intellectual and religious presuppositions while battling his fear of physical danger. Blinding himself to the "more spiritual terrors" of the world, he has deprived himself of the ability to cope with them effectively. He is, as Ishmael describes him, a "valor-ruined man."[1]

Starbuck's great spiritual test and his ultimate destruction come in his confrontation with the demonic fury of Captain Ahab. Ahab forces the mate into two different manifestations of cowardice. In the first place, because he is forced to deal professionally with Ahab, Starbuck inevitably finds himself delving into the mind of his superior. And in doing so, he begins to see, as if Ahab were projecting it on a screen before him, the world as the Captain himself sees it. For the first time, Starbuck's eyes are opened to the subtle horrors which lurk in man and in the universe. He is confronted with overpowering evil,[2] first in Ahab himself and then, through Ahab, in a universe which to Starbuck had previously seemed firmly controlled by a beneficent God. But Starbuck cannot, will not allow this new-found knowledge of life to take root in his mind. Here he interprets the marks on the doubloon nailed to the mast.

> A dark valley between three mighty, heaven-abiding peaks, that almost seem the Trinity, in some faint earthly symbol. So in this vale of Death, God girds us round; and over all our gloom, the sun of Righteousness still shines a beacon and a hope. If we bend down our eyes, the dark vale shows her mouldy soil; but if we lift them, the bright sun meets our glance half way, to cheer. Yet, on, the great sun is no fixture; and if, at midnight, we would fain snatch some sweet solace from him, we gaze for him in vain! This coin

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[1] Moby-Dick, p. 104.

[2] Evil in the sense of an element of chaos and destruction in both the natural world and the moral life of man. It is Ahab who sees this generalized concept of "evil" in terms of moral evil alone.

> speaks wisely, mildly, truly, but still sadly to me. I will quit it, lest Truth shake me falsely.[1]

Starbuck feels that his faith is inadequate to face the realities of the world, but again and again he must fall back upon it as his only source of security. He speaks to the sea: "Tell me not of thy teeth-tiered sharks, and thy kidnapping cannibal ways. Let faith oust fact; let fancy oust memory; I look deep down and do believe."[2] Starbuck, then, is afraid even to admit that the world is permeated with an evil that he cannot explain.

The second form of cowardice displayed by Starbuck is his inability to restrain Ahab from committing what the mate believes is a dreadfully evil act, an act which could easily lead to the destruction of the Pequod and her whole crew. Starbuck's religious trust and his immersion in the life of the heart render him totally incapable of appreciating Ahab's rage against the White Whale or of overcoming the power which that rage spawns in Ahab's soul. Starbuck comes closest to swaying Ahab from his intention by his appeal to the older man's emotional ties with the land, but even this attempt is abortive. The complete failure of Starbuck's religion, in a manner of speaking the last hope of Christianity in Moby-Dick, is revealed in the following incident. Melville narrates this scene with bitter irony tempered by the sense of tragedy in the character of Starbuck and perhaps by wistfulness over the final rejection of religion as an answer to evil.

> "Against the wind he now steers for the open jaw," murmured Starbuck to himself, as he coiled the new-hauled main-brace upon the rail. "God keep us, but already my bones feel damp within me, and from the inside wet my flesh. I misdoubt me that I disobey my God in obeying him!"
>
> "Stand by to sway me up!" cried Ahab, advancing to the hempen basket. "We should meet him soon."
>
> "Aye, aye, sir," and straightway Starbuck did Ahab's bidding, and once more Ahab swung on high.[3]

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[1] Moby-Dick, p. 360. [2] Ibid., p. 406. [3] Ibid., p. 461.

Unable to maintain Father Mapple's simple faith in Providence in the face of the world's disorder and equally powerless to accept Ahab's equally simplistic doctrine of total defiance, Starbuck is morally paralyzed. He drifts toward death feebly struggling to maintain religious assumptions which he is too weak to discard but which themselves are too weak to sustain him.

But after all Starbuck is a man more to be pitied than blamed, for despite his good intentions he is trapped in a very difficult situation. In "The Musket," a chapter near the end of the Pequod's voyage, Starbuck finds himself severely tempted to end his struggle with Ahab by killing the old man as he sleeps. Starbuck reasons that Ahab is embarked on a course potentially fatal to the whole crew. The mate remembers that Ahab threatened him with the very gun he now holds. However, Starbuck is overcome by horror at his own thoughts. He wishes to stop Ahab, but he feels that he must do so by lawful, moral means. But such is Ahab's power that Starbuck can find no such method of restraining him. Any attempt to wrest control of the ship from him would be mutinous; and to kill in cold blood even a madman, who obviously suffers more pain than he can inflict upon others, would contradict Starbuck's humane ethics. And so the mate, paralyzed rather than aided by his religion, is forced to grant Ahab the freedom to destroy the Pequod and its crew. As Ishmael points out, Starbuck is the victim of "the incompetence of mere unaided virtue or right-mindedness";[1] for without the personal strength to reinforce them that Ahab possesses, the precepts of religion are useless.

Had Starbuck acted upon his impulse to murder Ahab, he would have found himself in the same terrible situation as that of his Captain -- the condition of being driven to evil by a vision of evil. But even in this eventuality, Starbuck would have remained only a pale reflection of Ahab, for Ahab possesses the intense, restless, probing mind that Starbuck lacks. As Captain Peleg tells Ishmael: "Ahab's above the common; Ahab's been in colleges, as well as 'mong the cannibals; been used to deeper wonders than the waves; fixed his fiery lance in mightier, stranger foes than whales."[1] A man of blazing intellect, Ahab is no stranger to the beauty and the ugliness of the world. How, then, could he have been so shattered by his encounter with Moby Dick? On the basis of Elijah's hints about "that deadly skrimmage with the Spaniard afor~~d~~e the altar in Santa," and "the silver calabash he spat into,"[2] one assumes that Ahab has always been self-assertive, that he has been used to dealing with the "powers of heaven, hell, and earth" as their equal. His livid scar, received in "an elemental strife at sea,"[3] must have been accepted without flinching and then made to seem meaningless by his victory over wind and wave. And yet despite his intelligence, despite his bravery, Ahab had remained as naive as Starbuck until Moby Dick "had reaped away [his] leg, as a mower a blade of grass in the field";[4] for he had thought that in his own proper self he was equal to all the world had to offer. Unfortunately the revelation to him of his error was not gradual but catastrophic. Melville pondered the potential dangers of such an event as he checked and scored this passage in Goethe's *Poetry and Truth*: "When one enters once into the world, and gives way to it, it is necessary to be very cautious, lest one should be carried away, not to say driven mad by it."[5]

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[1] Moby-Dick, p. 162.

As we piece together his story from his condition at the beginning of the book and from the accounts of Peleg and Ishmael, Ahab apparently reacts to his dismemberment by immersing himself in his own physical and mental agony. Once the initial period of shock ends, however, he begins to think about the meaning of his injury, to try to find some rational explanation for his being singled out for attack by the supposedly irrational Moby Dick. The only possible answers to this inquiry are either that there is no answer or that somehow Moby Dick has been directed to his prey. It is not surprising that at this juncture, as Ishmael tells us, Ahab "came to identify with [the whale], not only all his bodily woes, but all his intellectual and spiritual exasperations."[1] For his confrontation with Moby Dick forces Ahab to admit, just as the older Redburn had to admit, that he has failed to fulfill the promise of his manhood. He must now face the fact that there are forces he cannot control, mysteries he cannot unravel, events he cannot categorize or rationalize. In other words he must recognize that his spiritual and physical security is highly precarious. Ahab moves from these powerful realizations concerning his own life to an intuition (probably unique in his life to this point) that other human beings, all men in fact, suffer the same frustrations and indignities that he has been forced to undergo. He sees that mankind is under a constant, though often unnoticed threat by powerful, hostile forces. Slowly Ahab transfers the frustrated rage that has welled up within him from his own personal problem to the total human condition. He feels that, were he able to revenge himself upon the source of disorder and pain in the world, he would strike a blow for the dignity of all men. The object of his counterattack is a natural one for him:

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[1] *Moby-Dick*, p. 76.

[2] *Ibid*., p. 87.

[3] *Ibid*., p. 110.

[4] *Ibid*., p. 160.

[5] Leyda, I, 355.

> All that most maddens and torments; all that stirs up the lees of things; all truth with malice in it; all that dracks the sinews and cakes the brain; all the subtle demonisms of life and thought; all

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[1] Moby-Dick, p. 160.

> evil, to crazy Ahab, were visibly personified, and made practically assailable in Moby Dick. He piled upon the whale's white hump the sum of all the general rage and hate felt by his whole race from Adam down; and then, as if his chest had been a mortar, he burst his hot heart's shell upon it.[1]

It is interesting to examine the assumptions on which Ahab bases his quest for Moby Dick. His pride will not let him admit that the whale's attack is not rationally comprehensible, for were that the case he would have no recourse but to accept it as an unavoidable accident. This is too much of an affront for his powerful ego to bear: "That inscrutable thing is chiefly what I hate."[2] So he simply concludes that the whale is intelligently directed. It is at this point that Ahab's false logic turns him into a "religious" man. He insists on treating his amputation as a malicious attack. Even when he speculates that "there's naught beyond" the whale, he instinctively views his attacker as a rational being. Thus Ahab falls into the trap Melville warns against in Moby-Dick -- the trap of believing that he understands and can somehow affect the forces which influence man's life. In criticizing this "religious" point of view, Melville is not insisting that the world is meaningless. What he is saying is that, even if there is a God and even if that God does act in history, man cannot know what His purposes are. Ahab automatically equates a divine plan with one that is meaningful to him personally. Melville denies that this is so or that, if it is so, man can be certain that it is. Thus we do not find in Moby-Dick the kind of "God-baiting" that many critics seem to see there, unless the reasonable assumption that Ahab's railing is an outlet for Melville's own frustration is emphasized beyond all reasonableness. Rather, Melville attempts to show what happens to a man whose belief in God's existence and His direct relationship to human life leads him to hold a remote Deity personally responsible for the world's evil.

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[1] Moby-Dick, p. 160.

[2] Ibid., p. 144.

Ahab's quest for Moby Dick, then, is not a search for a whale that had once injured him nor is it even a symbolic representation of man's proud determination to know all the mysteries of the universe. Rather it is an assertion on Ahab's part that He who created those mysteries to baffle and frustrate mankind has offered to His noblest creatures an unendurable insult and that man's only redress is to launch an implacable though probably futile attack on the Deity. But we need no exercise of theological reasoning to show that Ahab's quest is based on essentially religious assumptions. The words and actions of the Captain are themselves sufficient proof that his quest is a religious one (or more technically, an anti-religious one, in the sense that his vision of the world is a reflection of but is diametrically opposed to that of orthodox religion).

First of all, Ahab has taken the Christian God and transmuted Him not to a Manichaean duality but to a simple principle of evil. Then instead of attempting to propitiate this powerful source of evil, Ahab logically reverses the form of worship usually accorded the Deity from adoration to defiance. Secondly, he undergoes a personal metamorphosis from a state of self-pity to one of compassion for all men. But as his rage at what he conceives of as the universal degradation of man increases, he completes the cycle of change and again becomes totally self-centered. Transcending his recognition that he is only one small unit of suffering humanity, he imagines himself the representative of all men before the throne of God. But, instead of pleading for the salvation of mankind, he will give the lie to a Deity who endowed His creatures with intelligence and will only to frustrate both faculties with an irrational universe. This man who has, as Ishmael says, "a crucifixion in his face"[1] sees himself as an inverted Messiah. Just as Christ is the new Adam who encompasses in His nature all humanity in order to redeem it, Ahab is, in his own words, the old Adam, "staggering beneath the piled centuries since Paradise."[2] He will present mankind's mutilated body to God not as Christ did, in satisfaction for human sin, but in judgment of God Himself.

Ahab takes his role as Messianic high-priest seriously; and he makes the decks of the Pequod, which Ishmael compares to "the pilgrim-worshipped flagstone in Canterbury Cathedral where Becket bled,"[3] the scene of impressive religious pageantry. Many of Ahab's rituals are intended to magnetize the crew to his will, but they are also deliberate acts of challenge and derision to all of the world's non-human powers. Many of his religious actions are Christian in origin, such as the "Last Supper" drink of grog which he gives the harpooners in the sockets of their own weapons and the Satanic baptism of his harpoon with the blood of savages.

But his most impressive and most significant act of inverted worship occurs in the chapter "The Candles." He reveals there that he had been a worshipper of the "clear spirit of clear fire . . . till in the sacramental act so burned by thee, that to this hour I bear the scar."[4] The treachery referred to here must have amazed and confused Ahab at the time of its occurrence, but apparently he did not realize its full meaning until his clash with Moby Dick. Within a few pages of "The Candles" Ahab makes two references to another kind of fire -- the sun. In his bizarre way he reviles the quadrant, saying that his eyes have been burned by the sun and that "[l]evel by nature to this earth's horizon are the glances of man's eyes; not shot from the crown of his head, as if God had meant him to gaze on his firmament."[1] Why is Ahab angered at having once looked toward the sun with pleasure? The answer has already been given a few pages before in Ahab's soliloquy over the body of a dead whale:

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[1] Moby-Dick, p. 111. [2] Ibid., p. 444. [3] Ibid., p. 67.

[4] Ibid., p. 416.

> He turns and turns him to it, -- how slowly, but how steadfastly, his homage-rendering and invoking brow, with his last dying motions. He too worships fire; most faithful, broad, baronial vassal of the sun! -- Oh that these too-favoring eyes should see these too-favoring sights . . . . [H]ere, too, life dies sunwards full of faith; but see! no sooner dead, than death whirls around the corpse, and it heads some other way . . . . In vain, oh whale, dost thou seek intercedings with yon all-quickening sun, that only calls forth life, but gives it not again.[2]

Apparently Ahab has worshiped fire as a powerful and often beneficial (even if not benevolent) spirit of life. But his encounters with the lightning and then with Moby Dick have taught him that the "spirit of life" is as ambivalent as the rest of man's world. It can be creative or destructive, gentle or violent, kindly or malicious, all without warning. The spirit of fire, then, is as flawed as any power in the universe; and this is why Ahab contends that it is itself created and subsidiary, that there is "some unsuffusing thing beyond thee, thou clear spirit, to whom all thy eternity is but time, all thy creativeness mechanical."[3]

It is interesting to note, however, that as always in Moby-Dick the names attributed to God or the gods are unimportant. Ahab's reaction against the fire is typical of him and is equally applicable to the Christian Deity. Ahab cannot bear to think that a remote, indifferent God could have formed this world, for that concept would prohibit him from redressing mankind's grievances. So he imagines that the Creator of the world is in fact just as ignorant of the true nature of things, just as subservient to a Deity beyond Him as He forces man to be to Him: "Light though thou be, thou leapest out of darkness."[1] Then he assumes that this secondary Creator is inherently malicious, and in so doing he not only ignores His ambivalence but introduces it as proof of His Satanic trickery. Logically, having once acknowledged the power of this same spirit through normal worship, Ahab has only one course to follow: " . . . I now know thee, thou clear spirit, and I now know that thy right worship is defiance."[2] In other words, convinced that the Deity has deliberately directed the forces of nature against him personally, Ahab is driven to recognize the injustice formally. In "The Candles" he defies the strength and malice of his adversary by holding the chains of the lightning rods while the ship is bathed in a fire of static electricity. Beyond this his ultimate act of worship is to commit himself and his crew to the sacrifice of Moby Dick, whom the sun had brought into being and in whose blood lurks the destructive violence of lightning. Ironically, like Christ, Ahab becomes not only priest but victim.

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[1] Moby-Dick, p. 412. [2] Ibid., p. 409. [3] Ibid., p. 417.

Any literate reader of Moby-Dick can think of analogues and possible sources for the character of Ahab, but most would agree that the imaginative intensity with which the Captain is conceived and portrayed makes him unique. But there was one writer in the nineteenth century who, in his characteristically psychoanalytic way, described the malady of Ahab almost exactly -- Soren Kierkegaard, a man who, like Ahab and Melville, was searching for a "long gun" to reach a remote God. In Fear and Trembling (1843) Kierkegaard writes a long analysis of the "demoniac" personality, one found, he says, only in the works of "real poets."[3] The man of genius, says Kierkegaard, must inevitably see that the world is not ordered in the neat, rational way that most men think it is. He discovers that, particularly in the moral sphere, every man wanders among mysteries and uncertainties which no amount of intelligence can penetrate or dismiss. Having recognized the true nature of human life, the real genius determines that, despite the fact that he is not fully in control of his life, he will "be himself." As Kierkegaard explains it, "in despair at his limitation (which in his eyes transforms his omnipotence into impotence)" the genius may seek "a demoniacal reassurance and therefore . . . not admit such limitation either before God or men" or he may "[reassure] himself religiously by love to the Deity."[1] The first course is the one chosen by Ahab, and Kierkegaard's analysis of the final state of such a man is remarkable:

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[1] Moby-Dick, p. 417.
[2] Ibid., p. 416.
[3] Kierkegaard, p. 206.

> A self which in despair is determined to be itself winces at one pain or another which simply cannot be taken away or separated from its concrete self. Precisely upon this torment the man directs his whole passion, which at last becomes a demoniac rage. Even if at this point God in heaven and all his angels were to offer to help him out of it -- no, now he doesn't want it, now it is too late, he once would have given everything to be rid of this torment but was made to wait, now that's all past, now he would rather rage against everything, he, the one man in the whole of existence who is the most unjustly treated, to whom it is especially important to have his torment at hand, important that no one should take it from him -- for thus he can convince himself that he is in the right.[2]

I cite Kierkegaard's portrait not only to demonstrate that Melville was not alone in his vision but to emphasize the ultimate divergence in the thought of these two very similar men. Both of them are intensely aware of a basic absurdity in human life; both of them, while they grudgingly admire the "demoniac" individual, reject defiance as a reaction to the human situation. Kierkegaard, of course, maintains (in the Protestant tradition) that a man should "be himself before God," that he should make his moral decisions as if they were absolute and trust without having intellectual certainty that God is with him. But for Melville such an alternative to Ahab's way of life is no alternative at all. Melville's contention in Moby-Dick is that the orthodox moral self-confidence of Father Mapple and the God-defiant righteousness of Ahab are essentially no different. In Melville's mind, then, the religious point of view resolves itself into two equally unacceptable positions: in the mass of men it becomes a weak moral imperative to "do good"; in stronger, more intense individuals it is transformed into an unfounded, potentially dangerous moral certainty. The first kind of man, represented in the novel by Starbuck, is destroyed when confronted with the complex moral situations created by this world. The other poses different and perhaps more terrifying dangers.

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[1] Kierkegaard, p. 116. [2] *Ibid.*, pp. 205-206.

Melville's major objection against Ahab is the same one that he has levied against religion in general since Redburn -- that the Captain does not serve the best interests of mankind or himself. Melville has long complained that the common form of religion tends to ignore the realities of human life in its concentration on the next world. In the same way, as his mind focuses more and more upon forces that lie beyond human comprehension, Ahab becomes increasingly separated from the humanity that he seeks to defend. Symbolically, the fact that Ahab views Moby Dick not as part of the natural world but merely as a "mask" through which he can strike at a remote Oppressor indicates how far removed from everyday reality his outlook has become. The process of Ahab's alienation begins, ironically, with the injury that begets his frantic quest. Newton Arvin makes an interesting point when he says that Ahab's loss of his leg symbolizes a "profound sexual injury."[1] A part of Ahab, more than just one of his limbs, has somehow become inhuman, sterile. The creativity, the potential for intimate human communication that had allowed him at an advanced age to father a child, is lost. Lost also is his receptivity to simple human pleasure. For example, he throws his still-lighted pipe into the ocean when he finds himself "unconsciously toiling, not pleasuring."[2] At times Ahab bemoans this attrition in his human feelings:

> Dry heat upon my brow? Oh! time was, when as the sunrise nobly spurred me, so the sunset soothed. No more. This lovely light, it lights not me; all loveliness is anguish to me, since I can ne'er enjoy. Gifted with the high perception, I lack the low, enjoying power; damned, most subtly and most malignantly! damned in the midst of Paradise![3]

But as his purpose becomes more obsessive, he expresses a wish to make himself more fit for his quest by obliterating his humanity altogether:

> Hold; while Prometheus is about it, I'll order a complete man after a desirable pattern. Imprimis, fifty feet high in his socks; then, chest modelled after the Thames Tunnel; then, legs with roots to 'em, to stay in one place; then, arms three feet through the wrist; no heart at all, brass forehead, and about a quarter of an acre of fine brains; and let me see -- shall I order eyes to see outwards? No, but put a sky-light on top of his head to illuminate inwards. There, take the order, and away.[4]

This attitude toward himself Ahab expands to include his fellow men. He would rather be able to pursue his enemy alone: "Cursed be that mortal inter-indebtedness which will not do away with ledgers. I would be free as air; and I'm down in the whole world's books."[5] But if he must depend upon others in his crusade, he will commit them totally to it, risk their lives as well as his, use them as if they were so many inanimate tools. After the announcement of the goal he has set for this voyage of the Pequod, he ponders: "Twas not so hard a task. I thought to find one stubborn, at the least; but my one cogged circle fits into all their various wheels, and they revolve. Or, if you will, like so many ant-hills of powder, they all stand before me; and I their match."[1] Starbuck points out the irony of Ahab's attitude: "Horrible old man! Who's over him, he cries; -- aye, he would be a democrat to all above; look, how he lords it over all below!"[2]

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[1] Arvin, Herman Melville, p. 172.

[2] Moby-Dick, p. 114.

[3] Ibid., p. 147.

[4] Ibid., p. 390.

[5] Ibid., p. 392.

Despite Ahab's wanton disregard for his fellow human beings and for himself, most readers find themselves sympathetic toward him. One reason for this reaction is that twice, near the end of the book, Melville is careful to reveal that Ahab still "has his humanities," as Peleg says.[3] First, a touching intimacy develops between the Captain and Pip, the little Negro who had jumped from the whaleboat and been left to drift in the open sea. Like Ahab, Pip has been exposed to the "heartless immensity"[4] of the universe; and like Ahab, Pip has been driven mad by the secrets revealed to him in that encounter. The sympathy that Ahab and Pip feel for each other reminds the reader that within Ahab's soul there lives, as Starbuck puts it, "some lurid woe would shrivel me up, had I it."[5] Ahab eventually rejects Pip's companionship, thereby bearing out Kierkegaard's analysis in that he fears that Pip will cure him of the "malady" which he now considers his "most desired health."[6] But only a few pages after this in "The Symphony" Ahab reveals that, though he can still think rationally, he is no longer in control of his actions:

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[1] Moby-Dick, p. 147. [2] Ibid., p. 148. [3] Ibid., p. 77.

[4] Ibid., p. 347. [5] Ibid., p. 148. [6] Ibid., p. 436.

> What is it, what nameless, inscrutable, unearthly thing is it; what cozzening, hidden lord and master, and cruel, remorseless emperor commands me; that against all natural lovings and longings, I so keep pushing, and crowding, and jamming myself on all the time; recklessly making me ready to do what in my own proper, natural heart, I durst not so much as dare?[1]

The longing for home and the encouragement of Starbuck to which Ahab nearly succumbs in this chapter are again stifled. But the response is still there. Ahab is still a man.

The man revealed by these final glimpses into Ahab's anguished soul is a tragic hero in the classic sense of inspiring both terror and pity. And it is by means of this dual character that Ahab fulfills the thematic purpose for which Melville intended him. For Melville perceived a danger in Ahab's course of action more disturbing than his withdrawal from humanity: Ahab's madness not only reveals both the brutal and the spiritual sides of human nature; it actually liberates the violent, destructive aspect of man's character, a force identical to that element in nature against which Ahab is rebelling. In other words, Ahab's intense concentration upon his own hatred of the whale and what it stands for has fragmented his personality, disturbing the balance between destructiveness and creativity which Melville recognized was at best precarious in all men. Ahab himself sees what he has done (though not always with sorrow): "They think me mad -- Starbuck does; but I'm demoniac, I am madness maddened! That wild madness that's only calm to comprehend itself!"[2] Ahab's rage at his personal injury or even at mankind's universal suffering was not itself madness; it became madness when he decided that he could alleviate it by direct action. His assumption that the source of his pain is "practically assailable" by striking at and through

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[1] Moby-Dick, pp. 444-445. [2] Ibid., p. 147.

Moby Dick channels his anger and frustration into a quest which must inevitably be destructive rather than creative. For Ahab has blinded himself to what is good and beautiful in the world. He has chosen to see only the deformed, violent aspect of what is in fact an ambivalent universe (symbolized by Moby Dick), and therefore he has released within himself the corresponding half of his own nature.

Speaking of Ahab's recurring nightmares, Ishmael gives a horrifying picture of the Captain's state of mind. In sleep, he speculates, Ahab's "living principle or soul" would try to escape from the monomaniac mind that had warped it to a single purpose which, "by its own sheer inveteracy of will, forced itself against gods and devils into a kind of self-assumed, independent being of its own. Nay, could grimly live and burn, while the common vitality to which it was conjoined, fled horror-stricken from the unbidden and unfathered birth."[1] Note that Ahab's mind has released a force abhorrent to the most elemental aspect of human existence -- life itself. By seeing nothing in the world worth saving, nothing potentially creative, Ahab has become both the servant and the prey of the very force in Moby Dick that he finds so dangerous, so intolerable: "That before living agent, now became the living instrument."[2]

But Melville clearly wishes to emphasize that Ahab is essentially no different from any other man, that the evil energies that he liberates lurk within human nature itself. Perhaps that is the significance of Fedallah. Despite the pseudo-Satanic and pseudo-Oriental claptrap with which Melville invests him and despite the attempts of critics to rescue him, Fedallah remains probably the most unsatisfactory character in Moby-Dick. We fail to accept him as real not because he is bizarre (what is Ahab?) but because he is not clearly conceived and surely portrayed. What is obvious is that Melville intended him to be a projection of the Captain's worst instincts, a false prophet urging Ahab to release the power that is in him and fight evil with evil, brutality with brutality. Fedallah is that aspect of Ahab which deceives the Captain into thinking that he is opposing rational malice rationally while in fact he is opposing mindless violence mindlessly. Yet why did Melville make Fedallah a separate character? Possibly for stage effect. Possibly to demonstrate by the Parsee's death the desperate futility of his creed. But possibly Melville also wished to warn the reader that Fedallah is not _merely_ a product of Ahab's madness, that he walks among all men and that he will serve any who agree to serve him. Ahab, then, represents every man. His tragedy consists in the fact that he is overwhelmed by his intense awareness of the frustrating limitations of human life revealed to him by Moby Dick. Ahab begins to see himself _primarily_ as an imperfect creature subject to the will (actually unknown) of a Supreme Being (also unknown); and his reaction is to insist against all reason, against a growing suspicion that he is doomed, that he is powerful enough to defeat any adversary. In this way lies madness.

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[1] Moby-Dick, p. 175.

[2] Ibid., p. 161.

It is with this madness that Melville concerns himself in his portrayal of religion in _Moby-Dick_. Whatever else the book is about, it is about the failure of religion in man's life. Whatever human significance the characters have, part of it lies in the fact that their religious point of view either leaves them vulnerable to the world's evil or actually destroys them. What was Melville's purpose in this harsh judgment of religion? On the basis of the book itself, Melville's letters, and the tenor of his mind, it seems to me that his motive was not spite (as some have assumed) but the need for exorcism. Like Kierkegaard, who was able so clearly to outline the characteristics of an Ahab, Melville was apparently on the verge of an explosion similar to the Captain's. More and more he had become discouraged by the vision of human suffering and evil that his books revealed to him as he wrote them. Simultaneously he had become progressively more convinced of the inability of religion, in which by instinct and training he desperately wished to hope, to alter significantly the conditions of human existence. Thus in one sense, the expression of Ahab's rage must have acted as a safety valve for the volcano of his own emotions. For it is not Ahab that Melville rejects but Ahab's "faith." Intellectually Melville could not help admiring a man of "globular brain and ponderous heart,"[1] a strong man who saw into the "blackness of darkness" and dared to defy it. Emotionally Melville could not help identifying his own doubts and frustrations with those of this Promethean hero. But what Melville could condemn in Ahab, what he felt that he _had_ to reject, was the essentially religious assumptions which led Ahab to commit evil in the cause of good. It was not the disapproval of society or even total destruction that Melville feared; it was a fanaticism which severed a man's ties with his fellow human beings and changed him from a savior to a destroyer.

Moby-Dick and particularly the portrayal of Ahab, then, were the means by which Melville attempted to exorcise altogether the religious point of view from his mind. Long ago he had seen the failure of religion to temper the savagery of a Queequeg even while it destroyed his dignity. In _Mardi_, _Redburn_, and _White-Jacket_ he had slowly come to the conclusion that the mild Christianity of a Starbuck was pathetically inadequate to cope with the complexities of the human situation. It remained now only to create an intensely powerful mind, thoroughly imbued with the assumption that man has a humanly comprehensible relationship to God, and to portray what he knew from his own experience would happen. It might be objected that the use of Ahab to criticize "normal" religion is unfair because Ahab is an extremist. But a comparison of Ahab's reasoning with the tenets of Father Mapple (who sounded normal enough to several critics for them to accept him as Melville's answer to Ahab) will show that he does not greatly distort the concept of religion. Melville would say, I think, that Ahab merely takes the religious point of view and logically expands it in proportion to the evil it must confront. The Captain's quest, then, is indeed a mirror-image of religion; and if that image is grotesque, the reason is that the total inability of religion to cope with the threats to human life is a grotesque joke on mankind. Melville felt that Father Mapple's religious certainty was an illusion, itself a form of madness. But the disillusion which often follows a revelation of religion's inadequacy can enhance rather than relieve the madness. Melville knew what Ahab's anguish must feel like:

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[1] _Moby-Dick_, p. 71.

> This going mad of a friend or acquaintance comes straight home to every man who feels his soul in him, -- which but few men do. For in all of us lodges the same fuel to light the same fire. And he who has never felt, momentarily, what madness is has but a mouthful of brains.[1]

Though he might agree with Ahab that to "neither love nor reverence" will the Deity respond,[2] Melville rejected the Captain's hate and defiance as a viable alternative. As Howard Horsford puts it, Ahab is unacceptable "not because he blasphemed, which merely distresses piety" but "because he agreed that there was a reality which made blasphemy meaningful."[1]

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[1] Letters, p. 83. [2] Moby-Dick, pp. 416-417.

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[1] Howard Horsford, "The Design of the Argument in Moby-Dick," Modern Fiction Studies, VIII (Autumn, 1962), 246.

Chapter VI

THE VITAL CENTRE:
ACCEPTANCE OF ISHMAEL'S FAITH

"Mid such a scene
Of Nature's terror, how serene,
That ordered form. Nor less 'tis cut
Out of that terror -- does abut
Thereon: there's Art."

(Clarel, II, xxx, 41-45.)

On February 12, 1851, Melville wrote a sharply worded letter to Evert Duyckinck in which he not only refused to send Duyckinck a daguerreotype and a small contribution for Holden's Dollar Magazine but also criticized Hawthorne more severely than he had ever done before. But he added a revealing postscript:

> I am just on the point of starting a'foot for the village, and have glanced over the previous letter, before, sealing. -- I thought there seemed an unkindness in it -- & that had I, under the circumstances, rec'd such a letter from you, in reply to such a letter as yours to me -- I would deem it not well of you. -- Still, I can't help it -- and I may yet be of some better service to you than merely jotting a paragraph for Holden's.[1]

Melville was laboring over Moby-Dick, and the intensity of his concentration was taking a toll on his nerves. But I think that it is reasonable to assume that the monumental artistic effort required to create such a book was not alone responsible for his weariness and short temper. Despite the fact that a few critics have contended that Melville was an implacable foe of religion, the evidence seems to indicate precisely the opposite: that Melville was drawn instinctively, almost irresistibly to religion by the hope that somehow it could give man the key to living a fully satisfactory life. In Moby-Dick he reveals that he could no longer sustain that hope without blinding himself to the true facts of the human situation; it is simply not possible that he could have reached this conclusion and then forced himself actually to speak it without suffering a great deal of mental anguish. The pain Melville must have felt is revealed not only in his letters but in the energy and ambivalence of the book itself, particularly of its portrayal of Ahab. As Howard Horsford says:

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[1] Letters, p. 122.

> Moby-Dick nevertheless is the response of a powerful imagination to the intellectual disintegration of faith . . . . Yet it is as a profoundly imaginative artist that Melville responds to the impact of new ideas on belief; as an artist he sensed fully -- more fully perhaps than any other novelist, certainly in England -- the profundity of that impact as vital experience. His rendering of that is what a reader must deal with ultimately.[1]

Ultimately the reader, and the critic as well, must deal also with Ishmael; for if it is evident that Melville was reluctant to abandon his waning religious faith, it should also be clear that a man of his mentality would not reject the religious point of view without attempting to replace it with a different sort of faith. And, having eliminated Father Mapple as a spokesman for Melville, there is no place to turn for the alternative to religion but to Ishmael. Ishmael's importance in the design of Moby-Dick has long been recognized, and especially in recent years the amount of commentary on his role has surpassed that on Ahab or the Whale. Therefore, though I may cite from the body of Ishmaelean criticism (particularly from the skillful and important work of Murray Krieger, Charles Feidelson, Paul Brodtkorb, and James Guetti), I will offer no systematic defense or refutation of any of it. In the long run, any interpretation of Ishmael or of *Moby-Dick* as a whole is seemingly partial; and it is perhaps more accountable to the logic of its own development than to the "eternal order of things" (if one exists).

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[1] Horsford, p. 234.

Something important has happened to Ishmael as a result of the events described in *Moby-Dick*, something difficult to describe. He has not become a saint or a prophet, but his attitude toward his life and the lives of others has changed somewhat. What he is as he writes *Moby-Dick* is a function of what he has experienced; and therefore he chooses to reveal himself precisely in terms of his voyage on the *Pequod*. In other words, having pondered his association with Ahab's quest and what it has done to him, he attempts to *re-create* his experiences within his new perspective and thereby to understand them. This is one of the reasons for his elusiveness. He *is* what he writes. And so an examination of Ishmael's role in *Moby-Dick* must itself be a story.[1]

The Ishmael we first meet is about to take to the sea as a cure for the "damp, drizzly November in my soul," as a means of "driving off the spleen."[2] The cause of his malaise Ishmael never reveals, but one may hazard a guess that he is simply disgusted with the way of the world in general. A poor man himself, he notes with amazement not only the indifference of the wealthy to the plight of the indigent but also the price the rich must pay for their inhumanity:

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[1] It is perhaps more confusing than useful to speak of *two* Ishmaels. The narrator of *Moby-Dick* looks back upon a man who has already begun to grapple with the problems posed by Ahab and the Whale in instinctive patterns of thought, patterns which are merely crystallized in the book. In other words, the narrator mirrors and records a process which he is still undergoing, which is not finished until the book is. Thus, after the *Pequod* sets sail, I will make no distinction between the narrator and the character.

[2] *Moby-Dick*, p. 12.

> Now, that Lazarus should lie stranded there on the curbstone before the door of Dives, this is more wonderful than that an iceberg should be moored to one of the Moluccas. Yet Dives himself, he too lives like a Czar in an ice palace made of frozen sighs, and being a president of a temperance society, he only drinks the tepid tears of orphans.[1]

Ishmael, however, is not merely a humanitarian social critic. He realizes that "it's too late to make any improvements now. The universe is finished; the copestone is on, and the chips were carted off a million years ago."[2] But this admission does not prevent him from being both embittered and unnerved by man's terrible vulnerability. Without much trouble, he says, Lazarus' body could have been made as resistant to the cold wind as Dives' house. And a later comment on the ocean shows that he is only too aware of how much misery man is subject to in this world: "And heaved and heaved, still unrestingly heaved the black sea, as if its vast tides were a conscience; and the great mundane soul were in anguish and remorse for the long sin and suffering it had bred."[3]

Ishmael's reaction to the human condition at the beginning of the book takes the form of fear, particularly the fear of death. He is disturbed by the conjunction of the name of the "Spouter Inn" with that of its owner, Peter Coffin.[4] He comments that "few are the moody fishermen, shortly bound for the Indian Ocean or Pacific, who fail to make a Sunday visit" to the

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[1] *Moby-Dick*, p. 19. [2] *Ibid*. [3] *Ibid*., p. 201.

[4] *Ibid*., p. 18.

Whaleman's Chapel in New Bedford; and he adds significantly, "I am sure that I did not."[1] Once in the Chapel and confronted with the grim worshipers and the marble memorial tablets, he ponders "how it is that we still refuse to be comforted for those who we nevertheless maintain are dwelling in unspeakable bliss; why all the living so strive to hush all the dead; wherefore but the rumor of a knocking in a tomb will terrify a whole city. All these things are not without their meanings."[2] But Ishmael does not wish to know these "meanings." He tells himself that "we have hugely mistaken this matter of Life and Death," that "what they call my shadow here on earth is my true substance," that while the body may die, "stave my soul, Jove himself cannot."[3] Ishmael's image for this type of reasoning, however, indicates that he is fooling himself: "But Faith, like a jackal, feeds among the tombs, and even from these dead doubts she gathers her most vital hope."[4] And later on, revealing his discomfort at not having seen Ahab before signing on the Pequod, Ishmael openly confesses his desire to avoid unpleasant reality: "But when a man suspects any wrong, it sometimes happens that if he be already involved in the matter, he insensibly strives to cover up his suspicions even from himself. And much this way it was with me. I said nothing, and tried to think nothing."[5]

The fact that Ishmael is writing his story at all, that he is attempting to face squarely a disturbing and complex experience, demonstrates that he has changed. He now realizes that no man can escape his fate; that is he cannot flee himself. On this round earth, he inevitably returns to the point from which he set out and meets himself there. In looking back upon the "springs and motives" by which "those stage managers, the Fates" had cajoled him "to set about performing the part I did," Ishmael significantly lists first and foremost "the overwhelming idea of the great whale himself."[1] He has been made to come to grips with the monster that symbolizes the deepest mysteries of man's world. But how did the frightened Ishmael come to be a quester after "clear Truth," which, he contends, "is a thing for salamander giants only to encounter"?[2] The first step in his transformation was accomplished through his association with Queequeg. Queequeg has such a beneficial effect on Ishmael because his savage nature touches the white man at his weakest point -- the fears which have nearly overwhelmed him. Peter Coffin slyly gulls the reluctant Ishmael into sharing a bed with an unseen, head-peddling harpooner; but his apprehensions are not equal to the startling reality of the tattooed cannibal who enters his darkened room. He becomes nearly hysterical when he sees Queequeg, though he insists that he is not a coward: "Ignorance is the parent of fear, and being completely nonplussed and confounded about the stranger, I confess I was now as much afraid of him as if it was the devil himself who had thus broken into my room at the dead of night."[3] We have here a paradigm of Ishmael's whole story. Queequeg has forced his new acquaintance to confront directly the nameless dread that haunts him and in doing so has shown Ishmael that he can overcome his fear, a lesson Father Mapple is unable to teach him successfully. Indeed it is after the service in the Whaleman's Chapel that Ishmael decides to "try a pagan friend . . . since Christian kindness has proved but hollow courtesy."[4]

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[1] Moby-Dick, p. 39. [2] Ibid., p. 41. [3] Ibid.

[4] Ibid. [5] Ibid., p. 90.

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[1] Moby-Dick, p. 16. [2] Ibid., p. 286. [3] Ibid., p. 29.

[4] Ibid., p. 53.

Queequeg's influence is vital to Ishmael's progress toward a better understanding of himself and others. Throughout his own life Melville hoped that, if he could not find a God to be the source of coherence, he could at least discover a friend, some "other" to provide him with the dynamic stability of two centers of life and thought instead of the perpetual wandering of one untethered mind. This is precisely what Queequeg does for Ishmael. He brings him out of his shell of self-indulgent fears and makes him admit not only that there is much potential good in human nature but that his own condition is not so hopeless that he cannot at least partially counteract the evil he does encounter. Much has been made of the sexual overtones of the friendship between Ishmael and Queequeg, but perhaps the most important implication of their "marriage" is that it rescues Ishmael from sterility. The narrator himself attests to Queequeg's effect upon him: "No more my splintered heart and maddened hand were turned against the wolfish world. This soothing savage had redeemed it."[1] Just as Christ, by his redemptive act, made human activity efficacious on a supernatural level, so Queequeg's act of selflessness and friendship renews Ishmael's potential for a creative life. The world seems to him again to be one of endless possibility; his trust in himself and in others is revived. He has re-entered the human race, prepared to interact meaningfully with his fellow men and their world.

It seems odd at first that, as important and as close as he is to Ishmael, Queequeg takes such a small part in the events of the voyage itself. But there are problems inherent in the Ishmael-Queequeg association which make it inevitable that the initial fervor of the relationship will diminish. It is one of the chief values of Queequeg's soothing effect on Ishmael that it does not blind him to reality. The vision of the world which Queequeg leads Ishmael to accept differs from his previous one not in terms of a decreased awareness of evil but of an increased awareness of good. Thus, in the first place, Ishmael realizes that while Queequeg is a good man he is also a savage, and it is this savagery in man and the world that he fears the most. It is no mere imaginative quirk that Queequeg's arm thrown over him reminds Ishmael of his youthful nightmare. Queequeg is just one embodiment of the shapeless terrors which lurk in the recesses of men's minds, and the fact that his embrace is one of affection only indicates that the world of Ishmael the man is more complex than that of Ishmael the child. The strange connection of Queequeg's unconscious act with the nightmare reminds Ishmael that the savage is an ambivalent and therefore dangerous creature. It also warns him that all men in their way are like Queequeg -- all are "sophomores," half civilized and half savage. The friendship between Queequeg and Ishmael, therefore, suffers from the universal limitation which later causes Ishmael to shun deep personal attachments: man's nature involves a violent, destructive aspect which can be neither completely eradicated nor fully controlled. Any total commitment to another individual may be a commitment to the very forces which threaten to annihilate human existence. And finally, Ishmael inevitably drifts away from Queequeg because he finds that Queequeg cannot teach him all he wants to know about the world. Queequeg has prepared the way for such an education, but it will take a voyage on the Pequod to complete it:

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[1] Moby-Dick, p. 53.

> And, as for me, if, by any possibility, there be any as yet undiscovered prime thing in me; if I shall ever deserve any real repute in that small but high hushed world which I might not be unreasonably ambitious of; if hereafter I shall do anything that, upon the whole, a man might rather have done than to have left undone; if, at my death, my executors, or more properly my creditors, find any precious MSS. in my desk, then here I prospectively ascribe all the

> honor and the glory to whaling; for a whale-ship was my Yale College and my Harvard.[1]

I do not mean to suggest, however, that Ishmael's relative lack of interest in Queequeg after Chapter XXVIII is totally deliberate. To Ishmael, as to Melville, Ahab is too powerful and too fascinating a person not to be the center of attention.[2] After his initial conversation with Peleg, before he ever sees Ahab, Ishmael is strangely drawn toward his future Captain:

> As I walked away, I was full of thoughtfulness; what had been incidentally revealed to me of Captain Ahab, filled me with a certain wild vagueness of painfulness concerning him. And somehow, at the time, I felt a sympathy and a sorrow for him, but for I don't know what, unless it was the cruel loss of his leg. And yet I also felt a strange awe of him; but that sort of awe, which I cannot at all describe, was not exactly awe; I did not know what it was. But I felt it; and it did not disincline me towards him; though I felt impatience at what seemed like mystery in him, so imperfectly as he was known to me then.[3]

Not only Ishmael's curiosity but his human sympathies, newly sharpened by Queequeg, are aroused by the "ungodly, god-like man." But when the quest for Moby Dick is announced, Ishmael's fate becomes intertwined with Ahab's on a deeper level than that of mere inquisitiveness or vague empathy:

> I, Ishmael, was one of that crew; my shouts had gone up with the rest; my oath had been welded with theirs; and stronger I shouted, and more did I hammer and clinch my oath, because of the dread in my soul. A wild, mystical, sympathetical feeling was in me; Ahab's quenchless feud seemed mine. With greedy ears I learned the history of that murderous monster against whom I and all the others had taken our oaths of violence and revenge.[4]

Ishmael seems to respond to Ahab's message for two reasons. First of all, like Ahab, he has become terribly aware of the "dread" which lies deep in his soul; and, having been divested of his timidity by Queequeg, he has become angry at a world which threatens all men without apparent reason. Secondly, Ishmael, again like Ahab, is attracted to Moby Dick because here at last is something tangible for outraged man to strike at. But even as he swears his oath, Ishmael does not commit himself totally to Ahab and his quest. Unencumbered by the Captain's monomania, Ishmael sees complexity where Ahab sees simplicity; and in the complexity Ishmael sees danger; "For one, I gave myself up to the abandonment of the time and the place; but while yet all a-rush to encounter the whale, could see naught in that brute but the deadliest ill."[1] It is not in Ishmael's nature to react to evil with mindless violence, even in his least cautious moments: "Not ignoring what is good, I am quick to perceive a horror, and could still be social with it -- would they let me -- since it is but well to be on friendly terms with all the inmates of the place one lodges in."[2]

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[1] Moby-Dick, p. 101.

[2] George Stewart suggests in his analysis of the revision of Moby-Dick that Ahab, having caught Melville's imagination assumed much of the role Queequeg was to play, including the manner of Queequeg's death -- "The Two Moby-Dicks," pp. 421-422.

[3] Moby-Dick, p. 77. [4] Ibid., p. 155.

Ishmael, then, has encountered a mystery, the complexity of which admits of no easy solution. And it is well for us to perceive as clearly as possible the nature of the problem posed by Moby Dick as Ishmael sees it. On the ontological level of understanding, Moby Dick demonstrates that, whether or not man can understand and control them, there exist forces in the universe inimical to human welfare. The Whale, for example, is "subhuman" in the scale of creation; and yet, maddeningly, he has been given the ultimate power over man -- the power of life and death. And even more puzzling and frustrating is the fact that the Whale's destructiveness seems to fit so smoothly into the order of nature:

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[1] Moby-Dick, p. 163.

[2] Ibid., p. 16.

> Judge, then, to what pitches of inflamed, distracted fury the minds of his more desperate hunters were impelled, when amid the chips of chewed boats, and the sinking limbs of torn comrades, they swam out of the white curds of the whale's direful wrath into the serene, exasperating sunlight, that smiled on, as if at a birth or a bridal.[1]

Granted that Moby Dick is only one creature, he is indisputably typical of forces -- physical and spiritual, visible and invisible -- that keep man "on edge," keep him constantly in danger of bodily and moral destruction, keep him from fulfilling his deepest human potential. Thus a man's attitude to the Whale's physical threat can set a pattern for his relationship to all of the world's dangers. And as usual that is precisely Ishmael's question: how am I to react to the conditions under which I live?

Ahab, of course, does not view Moby Dick merely as a threat to his life or even as a representative of all such dangers. Adopting a religious point of view, he moves to the teleological level of reasoning. Like Ishmael he insists that, if human life is to be worthwhile, the violence manifested by Moby Dick must be meaningful. But unlike Ishmael, Ahab automatically equates "meaningful" with "rationally understandable." Since the acts of Moby Dick are irrational in normal human terms, Ahab is forced to conclude that the significance of his dismemberment, for example, is cosmic rather than human in nature. And so his thinking becomes completely teleological, oriented toward neither the undeniable existence of evil as represented by the Whale's violence nor the aspects of that reality that man can apprehend with any certainty but toward the order which he believes Moby Dick's act serves and toward the Cause of that order -- the Deity. Also on this level, Ishmael is less interested in whether Ahab's assumptions are correct than in how man is to react to the possibility that they are correct.

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[1] Moby-Dick, p. 159.

Ishmael himself, however, raises the mystery of Moby Dick to a third level -- the epistemological. For though Ishmael might join Starbuck in rejecting the extreme to which Ahab carries his hatred of the Whale, he also shares Ahab's fear of meaninglessness. The "dread" that Ishmael feels (which must be distinguished from his nervous fear of death early in the book) is akin to Heidigger's Angst -- the fear of nothing. His reaction to the painting in the Spouter Inn, which depicts the whale in the moment of his most awesome power, is interesting:

> Such unaccountable masses of shades and shadows, that at first you almost thought some ambitious young artist, in the time of the New England hags, had endeavored to delineate chaos bewitched. But by dint of much and earnest contemplation, and oft repeated ponderings, and especially by throwing open the little window towards the back of the entry, you at last came to the conclusion that such an idea, however wild, might not be altogether unwarranted.[1]

Chaos -- it is with this that the Whale threatens man. But the chaos the Whale both represents and embodies is not merely that of anarchical violence. In "The Whiteness of the Whale" Ishmael indicates that the brutal destructiveness of Moby Dick is inextricably bound up with total emptiness or meaninglessness. For example the Whale cannot actually be characterized. He is neither beneficent nor destructive, nor is it quite correct to say that he is both. Similarly, whiteness cannot be described as either cheering or terrifying. In both cases the evidence, as Ishmael presents it, tends to cancel itself out. In terms of logic, the category in each case is contentless. The Whale as well as its whiteness seems meaningless. Thus, as Ishmael clearly points out, the man who rejects Ahab's point of view finds himself in another dilemma. If some Cause beyond man's world does not give meaning to that world, then what is man to make of the thousand cosmic injustices visited upon the human race every day? Is not human life itself emptied of significance by its subjection to forces totally beyond man's understanding? It is as if all the color in the world, "not actually inherent in substances, but only laid on from without," were stripped away. All "deified Nature," says Ishmael, would take on the sickly hue of death; and "like wilful travellers in Lapland, who refuse to wear colored and coloring glasses upon their eyes, so the wretched infidel gazes himself blind at the monumental white shroud that wraps all the prospect around him."[1]

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[1] Moby-Dick, p. 20.

And so for Ishmael Moby Dick offers a serious challenge to all reality as man comprehends it. For if God cannot be found to give meaning to the whale's actions, and if the Whale is so ambivalent as to be totally void of meaning in itself, then upon what can man base his hope? The plaything of forces beyond his knowledge or control, living in a world whose appearance belies its substance, must he simply submit to an existence whose poles are violence and emptiness? If he attempts to impose an order upon his life will the creations of his mind and imagination and body be illusory? Ishmael, then, is faced with the task of establishing a basis for man's perception of reality, of giving man the ability to do more with his life than submit to the vagaries of chance.

This statement of the nature of the problem posed by Moby Dick is of course too abstract to be true to Ishmael's final vision. By this I do not mean that he is incapable of theoretical speculation; chapters such as "The Whiteness of the Whale" demonstrate that he can and does engage in philosophical discourse. In this sense he might loosely be called an "idealist"; but at the same time he is an instinctive pragmatist. Perhaps the essential difference between Ahab and Ishmael is that, while Ahab tends to reduce Moby Dick to an abstraction, Ishmael always approaches the Whale and his mystery through the medium of direct human experience. Even from his general attitude toward the problems surrounding Moby Dick it is clear that Ishmael's method is experiential. On each of the three levels of reasoning he deals not with the Whale itself but with the Whale in relation to men, particularly to Ahab and himself. And here it becomes evident that Ishmael's solution to the philosophical dilemma outlined above is contained in his very premises. For instead of attacking the Whale frontally as Ahab does, Ishmael comes at him indirectly. The "horror" that he tries to be social with is not the mystery of the Whale but Ahab's relationship with the Whale, not the secret, dangerous forces which Moby Dick represents but the human life itself in the presence of those forces. In other words, if Moby Dick is inherently so ambivalent as to be devoid of meaning, then Ishmael will attempt to find human significance in "Ahab's quenchless feud" with the monster.

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[1] Moby-Dick, p. 170.

It is quite understandable, therefore, that Ishmael ceases to be an active character in the novel as soon as Ahab appears; Ishmael's thoughts, his very life are channeled through the Captain's in order to unravel the puzzle of man's existence. But those who say that Ishmael disappears completely from the book simply have failed to read it carefully. What remains, what in fact dominates the reader is Ishmael's inescapable voice. Ultimately more than a voice, it is a well-developed mentality, a point of view which structures and colors everything it touches.[1] And it is Ishmael's "presence" throughout the book that searches for and evaluates methods by which he can both discover and cope with the significance of the drama being enacted before him: "And some certain significance lurks in all things, else all things are little worth, and the round world itself but an empty cipher, except to sell by the cartload, as they do hills about Boston, to fill up some morass in the Milky Way."[1]

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[1] This point is amply supported by the analyses of Paul Brodtkorb in Ishmael's White World (New Haven, 1965) and James Guetti in The Limits of Metaphor (Ithaca, 1967).

Part of Ishmael's quest for a successful way of living in such a world as ours produces completely negative results. Religion, for example, he finds totally unacceptable as an answer to the problems inherent in human life. Some of his comments on this subject are flippantly satiric: he notes how eager Christians are to accumulate money, "the root of all earthly ills,"[2] or he ironically chides a whaleman for disputing the story of Jonah when the clergy obviously know more about whales than he does.[3] But portrayed seriously or comically, the religious life is badly flawed in Ishmael's eyes; and each shortcoming he uncovers is an indirect condemnation of Ahab's point of view. Ishmael's first encounter with religion in Moby-Dick (the grim Negro prayer meeting held, significantly, in an inn called "The Trap") is followed by a scene even more deeply disturbing. An anxious Ishmael comes to the Whaleman's Chapel for solace, for comfort, for hope; he finds only sad faces that reflect unrelieved grief. Father Mapple's sermon appears equally incapable of easing Ishmael's mind because it asks total submission to a Will he cannot fathom and promises peace only to those who accept meekly the buffetings of the very powers he fears.

Ishmael goes directly from Father Mapple's service to a different sort of religious ceremony. Queequeg invites his new friend to join him in adoration of his ebony god Yojo, and Ishmael rationalizes his acceptance in this fashion:

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[1] Moby-Dick, p. 358. [2] Ibid., p. 15. [3] Ibid., p. 308.

> I was a good Christian; born and bred in the bosom of the infallible Presbyterian Church. How then could I unite with this wild idolator in worshipping his piece of wood? But what is worship? thought I. Do you suppose now, Ishmael, that the magnanimous God of heaven and earth -- pagans and all included -- can possibly be jealous of an insignificant bit of black wood? Impossible![1]

The implications of this passage, the least of which is that the Presbyterian Church is obviously not infallible, are important. First of all, considering his dissatisfaction with Father Mapple and his subsequent decision to "try a pagan friend," Ishmael's worship of Yojo is no insincere condescension to an ignorant savage. Ishmael seems to believe that praying to a piece of wood is no less effective than praying to a remote, indifferent Deity. Secondly, Ishmael's breach of religious orthodoxy is motivated not by abstract principles but by friendship. Apparently he feels that human communication with a close friend is more likely to be beneficial than is an attempt to reach an unknown, unseen God. Moreover, he discovers in arguing with Queequeg about his Ramadan that religious belief can actually impede human solidarity: "After all, I do not think that my remarks about religion made much impression upon Queequeg. Because, in the first place, he somehow seemed dull of hearing on that important subject, unless considered from his own point of view . . . ."[2] What has aroused the tolerant Ishmael to controversy in the first place is the fact that, at least so far as his fasting is concerned, Queequeg's religion has subverted its purpose by doing the savage actual harm: "But when a man's religion becomes really frantic; when it is a positive torment to him; and, in fine, makes this earth of ours an uncomfortable inn to lodge in; then I think it high time to take that individual aside and argue the point with him."[1] Ishmael is not at all of the opinion, however, that Queequeg is alone in his foolishness:

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[1] _Moby-Dick_, p. 54. [2] _Ibid._, p. 82.

> I say, we good Presbyterian Christians should be charitable in these things, and not fancy ourselves so vastly superior to other mortals, pagans and what not, because of their half-crazy conceits on these subjects . . . . Heaven have mercy on us all -- Presbyterians and Pagans alike -- for we are all somehow dreadfully cracked about the head and sadly need mending.[2]

Obliquely but consistently, then, Ishmael rejects the religious view of life for the very pragmatic reason that it fails to do man much good. The unbridgeable gap between God and man ultimately brings about the ruination of any religious system: "For what are the comprehensible terrors of man compared with the interlinked terrors and wonders of God!"[3] At the same time, Ishmael is not willing to replace the _a priori_ religious world view he has rejected with an _a priori_ philosophical system. He believes that all men should acquaint themselves with the more subtle verities of human existence; but he says that a man who takes himself seriously enough to call himself a "philosopher," "like the dyspeptic old woman . . . must have 'broken his digester.'"[4] Ishmael's first objection to philosophical systems is that they inevitably fail to order human life in any permanent way. The famous philosophers may have written of man with great insight, but the wisdom in their writings derives from the philosophers, not the philosophies. When Ishmael compares the beautiful but dangerous well of sperm in the whale's skull to "Plato's honey head"[5] or the two whale heads hoisted on opposite sides of the _Pequod_ to Kant and Locke,[6] he is criticizing rigid systems, not the men themselves. For if man cannot reach God (or even be certain of His existence), then how can he construct an order which will encompass the vastness and complexity of the universe? As Melville says in his poem "The Conflict of Convictions":

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[1] _Moby-Dick_, p. 81.

[2] _Ibid._, p. 78.

[3] _Ibid._, p. 99.

[4] _Ibid._, p. 53.

[5] _Ibid._, p. 290.

[6] _Ibid._, p. 277.

YEA AND NAY --
EACH HATH HIS SAY;
BUT GOD HE KEEPS THE MIDDLE WAY.
NONE WAS BY
WHEN HE SPREAD THE SKY;
WISDOM IS VAIN, AND PROPHESY.[1]

For Ishmael, wisdom must always be contingent, a product of experience rather than of the fanciful constructs of the human mind. However, there are times when, on the way to his own brand of wisdom, Ishmael loses himself in abstraction. For example, while he and Queequeg are weaving mats aboard the Pequod, Ishmael falls into a reverie in which he sees their activity as a representation of human existence: the inflexible, automatic warp is necessity; Ishmael's hands, which he uses as the shuttle, are free will; and the wooden "sword" with which Queequeg, also dreaming, erratically drives home the yarn is chance. Ishmael's vision is interrupted, however, by Tashtego's call to the first lowering for a whale. Hurled suddenly into the chaos and violence which surrounds a struck whale, Ishmael is horrified. The despair which produces his reaction passes away, but it indicates what can happen to a man who things that his life is neatly ordered: "There are certain queer times and occasions in this strange mixed affair we call life when a man takes this whole universe for a vast practical joke, though the wit thereof he but dimly discerns, and more than suspects that the joke is at nobody's expense but his own."[2]

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[1] The Selected Poems of Herman Melville, p. 6.

[2] Moby-Dick, p. 195.

The converse of Ishmael's realization that philosophy is impractical because divorced from experience is that man cannot expect to produce a viable abstract order from the materials supplied him by his senses alone. In the first place the physical universe will frustrate his attempts to fathom it just as it renders insignificant his efforts to control it:

> [B]ut a moment's consideration will teach, that however baby man may brag of his science and skill, and however much, in a flattering future, that science and skill may augment; yet for ever and for ever, to the crack of doom, the sea will insult and murder him, and pulverize the stateliest, stiffest frigate he can make . . . .[1]

Moreover, man's own nature is such an unknown quantity that he cannot trust it to be his only guide through the world. Man and nature -- these are the components of Ishmael's world; they are the mysteries which the individual must unravel if he is to live a meaningful life. Ultimately the quests for the significance of each merge and become one and the same, for deep within man lurks the same violence and potential emptiness evident in nature. But Ishmael recognizes the supreme necessity of maintaining a clear separation between man and the universe, the "self" and the "other." In "The Mast-Head" he acknowledges the allure that the great, rolling sea can have for one on watch for whales. Just as in Genesis man alienated himself from nature by gaining knowledge of good and evil and thereby lost his instinctive knowledge of all that pertained to his earthly life; so perched high above the ship, the lookout feels that were he able to re-unite himself with nature he would again capture the "phantom of life." He sees in the sea "every strange, half-seen, gliding, beautiful thing that eludes him; every dimly-discovered, uprising fin of some undiscernible form, seems to him the embodiment of those elusive thoughts that only people the soul by continually flitting through it."[1] Caught up in his fantasy, the man on the mast-head "loses his identity"; but Ishmael issues a clear warning to such a dreamer:

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[1] Moby-Dick, p. 235.

> But while this sleep, this dream is on ye, move your foot or hand an inch; slip your hold at all; and your identity comes back in horror. Over Descartian vortices you hover. And perhaps, at mid-day, in the fairest weather, with one half-throttled shriek you drop through that transparent air into the summer sea, no more to rise for ever. Heed it well, ye Pantheists![2]

Total unity with nature and the ultimate knowledge which it can bring, then, is an illusion. The loss of self can be accomplished only at too great a price: either by going mad like Pip, whose soul was "carried down alive to wondrous depths, where strange shapes of the unwarped primal world glided to and fro before his passive eyes,"[3] or by death.

Ishmael has rejected the possibility of man's perceiving an order beyond nature. Likewise he insists that no absolute answers are forthcoming from the physical universe, a fact mirrored symbolically in his examination of the whale. He is not too awed by the "antemosaic, unsourced existence of the unspeakable terrors of the whale"[4] to try to take its measure. The attempt, however, is more or less unsuccessful. The whale cannot be accurately measured or even visualized, says Ishmael, because his skeleton does not give a true notion of his size and shape and because in the sea he is always partially hidden from view. Nor are the parts of the whale that are hoisted aboard the Pequod any more revealing of the monster's physical attributes and of the secrets which both Ahab and Ishmael are convinced the whale hides behind "his pyramidical silence."[5] Even though he has seen the whale dissected, Ishmael's analysis of the beast is only "skin deep."[6] The sperm whale's face, the feature of the body we normally trust to reveal a creature's deepest characteristics, is no face at all; it is a forehead, "one broad firmament of a forehead, pleated with riddles."[1]

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[1] Moby-Dick, p. 140.
[2] Ibid.
[3] Ibid., p. 347.
[4] Ibid., p. 380.
[5] Ibid., p. 292.
[6] Ibid., p. 318.

However, Ishmael's examination of the whale in general and Moby Dick in particular does bear some fruit, for he recognizes that "reality" is contingent rather than absolute, that it is to be found complete neither in man's mind nor in the "other." Thus Ishmael is willing to accept the Leviathan on its own terms, neither demanding total understanding of it nor imposing a purely subjective interpretation upon it. He sees the whale as a monumental embodiment of a universal life-principle, a force which even in its ambiguity commands respect. And unlike Ahab he acknowledges the beauty as well as the violent power of the whale. Moreover Ishmael seems to repudiate Ahab's assumption that the whale is an agent of some higher power. Ishmael says of the "Town-Ho" story (which might appear to support Ahab's position) that it "_seemed_ _obscurely_ to involve with the whale a certain wondrous, inverted visitation of one of those _so called_ judgments of God which at times are _said_ to overtake some men."[2] Ishmael could not have qualified this statement much more without negating it altogether. In fact, the story as he tells it clearly shows that Moby Dick's involvement in the death of the villain Radney is totally accidental, that it is brought about by a "stupid Teneriffe man"[3] who spots the White Whale just as Steelkilt is about to murder the mate. Ishmael, then, would like to be able to fathom the secrets of the whale, secrets of the world's creation, secrets of its ordering principle if it has one; but he is also willing to accept the fact that the whale's ambivalent nature and man's own inescapable limitations make the attainment of such knowledge impossible. Ultimately, Ishmael's position is that the whale, like all physical nature, seems indifferent to man. Without sacrificing his individual identity, man should be able to benefit from nature's beauty and ability to supply his needs. At the same time, he has no right to be surprised or angered if he falls victim to its mindless violence, which always coexists with its more beneficial aspects.

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[1] _Moby-Dick_, p. 292. [2] _Ibid._, p. 208 (italics mine).

[3] _Ibid._, p. 221.

An important pattern of thought emerges in Ishmael's discussion of the whale. In searching for a resolution of the problems posed by the conflict between Ahab and Moby Dick, Ishmael does not seek answers which will make the mysteries of life disappear. Rather he tries to establish a method of coping with the problems as they exist. Man and nature, Ishmael decides, are alike in that both of them are repositories of the mystery of the how and why of life. They are alike also in that neither of them will yield the key to the tantalizing secrets they hold. And Ishmael's advice concerning man is like his warning in "The Mast-Head":

> And still deeper the meaning of that story of Narcissus, who because he could not grasp the tormenting, mild image he saw in the fountain, plunged into it and was drowned. But that same image, we ourselves see in all rivers and oceans. It is the image of the ungraspable phantom of life . . . . [1]

Man cannot afford to focus his attention completely upon what lies forever beyond his ken, upon the maddening limitations which inhere in his nature but which his mind tells him should not be there. On the other hand, Ishmael insists that men should try to understand themselves and their situation as completely and as honestly as possible. Only in this way can the promise which seems to dance just out of their reach be at all realized.

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[1] Moby-Dick, p. 14.

Men must become aware first of all, says Ishmael, that they are constantly menaced by dangers from without and from within. From the moment of his birth onward, all that a man can become is threatened by death. At any moment the dreams, the ambitions, the human relationships of each individual can be cut off, annihilated, as if they never were. Other, more subtle dangers combine to make life's progress to death an arduous one, circumstances unseen and often uncaused by human agency which can drive a man to crime, despair, and madness. But most men, says Ishmael, fail to comprehend the seriousness of their situation:

> But why say more? All men live enveloped in whale-lines. All are born with halters round their necks; but it is only when caught in the swift, sudden turn of death, that mortals realize the silent, subtle, ever-present perils of life. And if you be a philosopher, though seated in the whale-boat, you would not at heart feel one whit more of terror, than though seated before your evening fire with a poker, and not a harpoon, by your side.[1]

Note that Ishmael counsels awareness here, not blind, cringing fear. In fact, speaking of a floating dead whale which is mistaken by some mariners for an island or shallows and marked on a chart, he complains that men, who do not even see clearly the deadly peril that does menace them, imagine things to be afraid of:

> And for years afterwards, perhaps, ships shun the place; leaping over it as silly sheep leap over a vacuum, because their leader originally leaped there when a stick was held. There's your law of precedents; there's your utility of traditions; there's the story of your obstinate survival of old beliefs never bottomed on the earth, and now not even hovering in the air! There's orthodoxy![2]

Some of the external threats to man's welfare can be avoided if they are recognized in time, and the others at least will not come as any surprise. But the evil and ignorance inherent in man's own nature present a more complex problem. In the books before Moby-Dick, Melville had been insisting more and more vehemently that man engenders at least as much evil as is visited upon him from without; and Ishmael reinforces this contention by comparing the violence in man to the violence in the sea. Describing the habits of killer whales, he mentions that "[e]xception might be taken to the name bestowed upon this whale, on the ground of its indistinctness. For we are all killers, on land and on sea; Bonapartes and Sharks included."[1] Several times in the book men are compared with sharks, an image made more forceful by Ishmael's advice that anyone who has not seen sharks gather around a dead whale might well "suspend [his] decision about the propriety of devil-worship, and the expediency of conciliating the devil."[2] Indeed there does reside in man a great dignity, "that democratic dignity which, on all hands, radiates without end from God; Himself!"[3] And in this respect, man is different from nature. He has been given a spark of the divine, a potential for intelligence, love, wisdom, peace. And this same capability is shared, though perhaps not equally, among all men, rich and poor:

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[1] Moby-Dick, p. 241.

[2] Ibid., p. 262.

> If, then, to meanest mariners, and renegades and castaways, I shall hereafter ascribe high qualities, though dark; weave round them tragic graces . . . then against all mortal critics bear me out in it, thou just Spirit of Equality, which hast spread one royal mantle of humanity over all my kind![4]

But it is interesting to find Ishmael using nearly the same words to describe the crew of the Pequod in a somewhat different fashion later on:

> Here, then, was this grey-headed, ungodly old man, chasing with curses a Job's whale round the world, at the head of a crew, too, chiefly made up of mongrel renegades, and castaways, and cannibals -- morally enfeebled also, by the incompetence of mere unaided virtue or right-mindedness in Starbuck, the invulnerable jollity

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[1] Moby-Dick, p. 125. [2] Ibid., p. 250. [3] Ibid., p. 104.

[4] Ibid., pp. 104-105.

of indifference and recklessness in Stubb, and the pervading mediocrity in Flask.[1]

The ambivalence revealed in these two passages indicates the temper of Ishmael's final attitude toward mankind. Recognizing, as Ahab does, that man's natural dignity is often veiled or destroyed by forces beyond his control, Ishmael also sees that individual men can be despicable or even dangerous creatures. Because the "democratic dignity" which he hails is one born of man's potential rather than of his achievement, Ishmael's relationships with individuals are cautious. He does make it clear that under no circumstances should a man's attention turn completely toward himself; for when the ego expands to the point at which it feels capable of absorbing the whole world, the man suffers the fate of Narcissus. Having become the center and circumference of all being, the ego becomes totally empty rather than completely full; and the luckless soul, like Ahab, drowns in a self-created abyss. But on the other hand, one cannot love all men indiscriminately. Ishmael has such a dream of world unity while he is squeezing sperm; but, like his reverie on the mast-head and while mat-making, this vision must be qualified in view of the realities of this world:

> Oh! my dear fellow beings, why should we longer cherish any social acerbities, or know the slightest ill-humor or envy! Come; let us squeeze hands all round; nay, let us all squeeze ourselves into each other; let us squeeze ourselves universally into the very milk and sperm of kindness.
>
> Would that I could keep squeezing that sperm for ever! For now, since by many prolonged, repeated experiences, I have perceived that in all cases man must eventually lower, or at least shift, his conceit of attainable felicity; not placing it anywhere in the intellect or the fancy; but in the wife, the heart, the bed, the table, the saddle, the fire-side, the country; now that I have perceived all this, I am ready to squeeze case eternally. In visions of the night, I saw long rows of angels in paradise, each with his hands in a jar of spermaceti.[2]

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[1] Moby-Dick, p. 162. [2] Ibid., pp. 348-349.

Again, Ishmael warns himself that he cannot afford to abandon his identity, even in order to overcome his isolation, and that such a unity as the one he pictures is truly possible only in Paradise.

Ishmael's position, then, is that man must reach out from himself; he cannot live totally in and for himself. He should feel a real, active sympathy for all men: for those who have managed in some measure to realize their potential, because of the hopefulness of their victory, and for those who have failed for one reason or another to be fully human, because of the tragedy of their defeat. Moreover, man should affirm the values of "the wife, the heart, the bed, the table, the saddle, the fire-side, the country." He should establish close contact with at least a few other mortals in order to attain the stability of a dynamic interchange of love and thought and sorrow. But, as Ishmael clearly points out, such relationships are as dangerous as they are necessary. Having described the "monkey-rope" by which he is bound to Queequeg on the whale's back, Ishmael takes a slap at the conception of a benevolent God as he portrays the conditions under which man must live:

> So strongly and metaphysically did I conceive of my situation then, that while earnestly watching his motions, I seemed distinctly to perceive that my own individuality was now merged in a joint stock company of two: that my free will had received a mortal wound; and that another's mistake or misfortune might plunge innocent me into unmerited disaster and death. Therefore, I saw that here was a sort of interregnum in Providence; for its even-handed equity never could have sanctioned so gross an injustice. And yet still further pondering -- while I jerked him now and then from between the whale and the ship, which would threaten to jam him -- still further pondering, I saw, I saw that this situation of mine was the precise situation of every mortal that breathes; only in most cases, he, one way or other, has this Siamese Connexion with a plurality of other mortals.[1]

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[1] *Moby-Dick*, p. 271.

As a result of his awareness of his situation, Ishmael decides that he must remain at least partially uncommitted, must maintain his freedom for the sake of his human dignity as well as his safety:

> Long exile from Christendom and civilization inevitably restores a man to that condition in which God placed him, i.e. what is called savagery. Your true whale-hunter is as much a savage as an Iroquois. I myself am a savage, owning no allegiance but to the King of the Cannibals; and ready at any moment to rebel against him.[1]

Thus, instead of vacillating between alienation and sentimentality, Ishmael attempts to keep the middle way, to recognize the good in each man and in all men but not to be trapped and destroyed by their evil.

One of Ishmael's comments on Queequeg might be applied to himself:

> Here was a man some twenty thousand miles from home, by the way of Cape Horn, that is -- which was the only way he could get there -- thrown among people as strange to him as though he were in the planet Jupiter; and yet he seemed entirely at his ease; preserving the utmost serenity; content with his own companionship; always equal to himself. Surely this was a touch of fine philosophy. . . .[2]

The Ishmael who writes Moby-Dick has changed throughout the book from a man with the impulse to knock people's hats off to one who fits Melville's description of Socrates as "cool, sarcastic, ironical"[3] as well as his portrayal of Hawthorne as a man with "a depth of tenderness . . . a boundless sympathy with all forms of being . . . an omnipresent love."[4] Ishmael is free and uncommitted but tolerant and loving toward his fellow men; he values his own opinion but he is capable of objective insight into the world around him; he is saddened by the ugliness and evil of the world, but he can still enjoy its beauty:

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[1] Moby-Dick, p. 232.

[2] Ibid., p. 52.

[3] Quoted in Sealts, Melville as Lecturer, p. 132.

[4] "Mosses," p. 539.

> And so, through all the thick mists of the dim doubts in my mind, divine intuitions now and then shoot, enkindling my fog with a heavenly ray. And for this I thank God; for all have doubts; many deny; but doubts or denials, few along with them, have intuitions. Doubts of all things earthly, and intuitions of some things heavenly; this combination makes neither believer nor infidel, but makes a man who regards them both with equal eye.[1]

It is this peculiar vision that Ishmael brings to bear upon Ahab and his conflict with the Whale. His attitude toward Ahab is complex. He deplores the Captain's intellectual and emotional tyranny over the crew, but at the same time he marvels at it. Toward Ahab's quest he is even more ambivalent. He admires the man for his bravery and pities him for his suffering; and he obviously finds his attitude more appealing than Starbuck's. Eventually, however, Ishmael must reject Ahab's point of view on the grounds that "[t]here is a wisdom that is woe; but there is a woe that is madness."[2] Though he shares substantially Ahab's vision of the world's subtle horrors, he warns against the old man's monomaniac preoccupation with evil:

> Look not too long in the face of the fire, O man! . . . believe not the artificial fire, when its redness makes all things look ghastly. To-morrow, in the natural sun, the skies will be bright; those who glared like devils in the forking flames, the morn will show in far other, at least gentler, relief; the glorious, golden, glad sun, the only true lamp -- all others but liars![3]

A man cannot allow himself to be so embittered by sickness, death, hatred, and injustice that he can see nothing else. Inevitably such a person destroys himself and others by struggling against an invulnerable cosmic order instead of working toward an attainable modicum of good. Even so, Ishmael cannot help adding the observation that the world against which Ahab has turned is quite a sufficient cause for his madness:

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[1] Moby-Dick, p. 314. [2] Ibid., p. 355. [3] Ibid., p. 354.

> Nevertheless the sun hides not Virginia's Dismal Swamp, nor Rome's accursed Campagna, nor wide Sahara, nor all the missions of miles of deserts and of griefs beneath the moon. The sun hides not the ocean, which is the dark side of this earth, and which is two thirds of this earth. So, therefore, that mortal man who hath more of joy than sorrow in him, that mortal man cannot be true -- not true, or undeveloped.[1]

Ishmael understands, he _feels_ Ahab's anguish so deeply that he never actually makes a moral judgment against the Captain with respect to his mad quest. He decides, however, that, whether Ahab is right or wrong, he himself does not want to become the slave of a vision of total evil:

> Oh, man! admire and model thyself after the whale! Do thou, too, remain warm among ice. Do thou, too, live in this world without being of it. Be cool at the equator; keep thy blood fluid at the Pole. Like the great dome of St. Peter's, and like the great whale, retain, O man! in all seasons a temperature of thine own.[2]

As far as Ishmael is concerned, man cannot know enough of the principles upon which this world is ordered, if ordered it be, to risk the life of his body and perhaps his soul in a frontal attack on the "phantom of life": "The weaver-god, he weaves; and by that weaving is he deafened; that he hears no mortal voice; and by that humming, we, too, who look on the loom are deafened; and only when we escape it shall we hear the thousand voices that speak through it."[3]

But having at last rejected Ahab's point of view, Ishmael is brought up against the problem of meaning: where is it to be found, if not in some comprehensible cosmic order? At one point Ahab defiantly cries, "Up helm! Keep her off round the world"; and an anxious Ishmael answers to himself: "Round the world! There is much in that sound to inspire proud feelings; but whereto does all that circumnavigation conduct? Only through numberless perils to the very point whence we started, where those that we left behind secure, were all the time before us."[1] So in fact man must return to himself as the source of meaning. But if he does so, will he not become another Ahab lost in a sea of total subjectivity, a man whose structuring of the world is completely self-created and illusory? Melville seems to have feared this possibility when he wrote to Hawthorne in June, 1851: "But what plays the mischief with the truth is that men will insist upon the universal application of a temporary feeling or opinion."[2] Ishmael, too, is conscious of the possibility that good and evil, beauty and ugliness are mere delusions of "baby man." Speaking of the breaching whale, he comments: "So in dreams, have I seen majestic Satan thrusting forth his tormented colossal claw from the flame Baltic of Hell. But in gazing at such scenes, it is all in all what mood you are in; if in the Dantean, the devils will occur to you; if in that of Isaiah, the archangels."[3]

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[1] _Moby-Dick_, pp. 354-355. [2] _Ibid_., p. 261. [3] _Ibid_., p. 374.

In order to escape the trap of subjectivity, Ishmael turns to the two principals of the conflict central to the book -- man and nature. If a man develops sympathy for all men and makes the effort to reach out lovingly to a few, if he views himself with self-respect but also with the realization that he is just one member of the vast human race, then he will be able to maintain his individuality without either being imprisoned in himself or abandoning his identity. If he can overcome his alienation from nature by recognizing in himself characteristics that he finds in the world around him and by not insisting upon the universal validity of his own Weltanschauung, then he can avoid living in a world that is totally self-created. Ishmael's movement toward this two-part point of view has already been described. But in order to discover the full significance of his experience on the Pequod he goes further; using the conflict of Ahab and Moby Dick as a thematic focus, he attempts to bring man and nature together in a structure which will make their meeting permanently meaningful. The way in which he accomplishes this feat seems fairly simple, but it has prompted a good deal of erudite and rather abstruse critical analysis in the past few years. Essentially Ishmael attempts to relate not the facts surrounding Ahab's quest for Moby Dick but his experience of that quest. Perhaps it would be more correct to say that he is creating, or re-creating, the experience as he writes about it.

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[1] Moby-Dick, p. 204.

[2] Letters, p. 131.

[2] Moby-Dick, p. 317.

For Ishmael is, ultimately, a writer, a fictionist, a story-teller. His dramatic narration of the "Town-Ho Story," replete with such conventional characteristics as the "frame" or narrative background, the miraculous event, and the folk-hero, places him in the tradition of the American myth-maker. He creates reality in the very act of narration, creates it not merely from his own imagination but from the interaction of materials drawn from both the world of sense and the world of mind. Ishmael asserts, first of all, that significance inheres in nature and order in the lives of men. But he also contends that this complex of significance and order can be explicated neither by reference to some God-made and revealed plan nor (as his parody of categorization in the "Cetology" chapter demonstrates) in simple, straightforward systems. Rather, meaning is apprehended and expressed in terms of experience, individual experience since there is no other kind that is real. Then, in order to open individually experienced reality to others, it is re-created in a fictional structure. It is in this imaginative creation that Ishmael's particular type of symbolism is born.

Many critics, in speaking of the symbolism in Moby-Dick, have assumed that it closely resembles Emerson's Transcendental concept that physical objects have spiritual meanings. Thus they are somewhat nonplussed when they observe, quite correctly, that this is precisely the attitude that Ahab takes; for they are then unable to explain adequately the effect that the Whale has on them as well as on the Captain. In fact, Ahab aside, the symbolism of Ishmael-Melville is categorically opposed to Emersonian Transcendentalism. Despite his concept of the Oversoul, Emerson adopts what is essentially the age-old position of an anthropocentric universe. In his symbolism man is the seer and thus the source of reality. Melville, however, refused to believe that the duality between self and other could be bridged so easily or that all nature bends itself to the comprehension of the man who knows how to look at it. Rather, Ishmael indicates that there is meaning in nature independent of man but that it is not _actual_ meaning as far as man is concerned until it is apprehended. In the process of "seeing," however, the meaning is fragmented, not only because of the differences between individuals but because no one mind is a perfect receiver of impressions.[1] Consequently, the man who wishes to go beyond mere experience to the expression of experience, as Ishmael does, must imaginatively put the meaning "back together." The symbolism in _Moby-Dick_ is a result of this process. For Ishmael recounts his experience in order to discover its meaning for himself, and while doing so he portrays the situation in all its complexity for the reader. Just as the struggle between the whaleman and the forces of nature reduces the stature of neither of them but in fact dignifies both combatants, so in the interplay of Ishmael's mind with his material neither factor is subordinated. He achieves a stable if limited truth not by giving us his opinions but by presenting us with a single human experience in all its immediacy, pregnant with the meaning that fascinated him in the first place. He has caught in artistic stasis a complex experience without sacrificing its potential significance for minds other than his own. He has, as far as possible, made sense out of the Whale and of Ahab's relationship to him not on Ahab's cosmic terms but in specifically human terms.[1]

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[1] Feidelson, _Symbolism and American Literature_, p. 32.

Paul Brodtkorb is quite right when he insists that Ishmael "does not survive because of some merit on his part."[2] The universe which Ishmael has created for the reader does not judge on the basis of moral rightness or wrongness. It does not judge at all. But Ishmael's rescue is meaningful, for it represents the way of life he has chosen. Rising from the vortex which has carried down with it those who followed Ahab in his mad quest and those who could offer no alternative to it, Ishmael is returend to the bosom of poor, fallible, suffering humanity. He has decided to accept earthly life with all its limitations, and he is quickly reminded of what that life entails by the fact that the Rachel is searching for members of her crew lost at sea. Rachel, weeping for her children because they were lost, has reason to weep as well for the orphan she has found; and he knows it as well as she. But in the writing of his narrative he has some hope. He has re-established loving communion with the humanity from which he had been alienated; he has managed to unite himself to some extent with the nature of which he is a part; and he has, in a world of flux, brought some order, some meaning to the chaos of experience. And for him that is all that can be hoped for this side of death:

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[1] Note that Ishmael's resolution differs from the Romantic concept of organicism in that the Romantics assumed that the imagination could act in creative cooperation with the external world because of an organic relationship between the mind and nature. Ishmael, however, must cope with a nature from which man is alien and whose order is not akin to that of man's mind.

[2] Brodtkorb, p. 138.

> Where lies the final harbor, whence we unmoor no more? In what rapt ether sails the world, of which the weariest will never weary? Where is the foundling's father hidden? Our souls are like those orphans whose unwedded mothers di~~d~~e in bearing them: the secret of our paternity lies in their grave, and we must there to learn it.[1]

What Moby-Dick was to Ishmael I have tried to describe; but what it was to Melville is somewhat different. For Ishmael the book was an attempt to bring meaning out of a complex and disturbing experience; for Melville it was the culmination of a long battle to resolve a deeply-rooted conflict in his intellectual life. He had seen more and more clearly since at least 1846 that religious faith could not satisfy him as an answer to the spiritual and social dilemmas facing his age. And yet he was well enough grounded in Christian doctrine to realize that the orthodox conception of God as the source of all reality was a useful one; for without the active presence of God in man's life there is nothing totally stable there. Thus if Melville was to abandon the religious point of view altogether, as he did in Moby-Dick, he was faced with the prospect of a meaningless world unless he could find some base for reality other than the Deity. As his conception of himself as an artist, a creator rather than a writer, became more dominant in his thinking, he began to see that in art lay a possible solution to his problem. James Guetti, in his fine book The Limits of Metaphor, comes to many of the same conclusions as I do in this study. I think, however, that he slightly mistakes Melville's intention in Moby-Dick when he says that the language and symbolism in the book are intended to hint at the "ineffable," the meaning in or beyond experience which cannot be expressed directly. It seems to me, rather that Melville was attempting to create a symbolic structure within which he could catch and control, as it were, the endless significances of experience. He hoped to establish an imaginative point of view which could evoke the meaning inherent in situations without destroying the immediacy of the experience by subjective categorization. Thus while Mr. Guetti is correct in saying that Melville is searching for unity, it is an artistic unity of experience (as opposed to the fragmented experience of real life) which can assimilate the world's multiplicity and thus make one man's view universally valid. Melville's endeavor, then, was not aimed merely at literary achievement; for unless he could create a world in which the cosmic absolutes of Ahab's vision were replaced by the limited, self-contained absolute of individual human experience, and unless that experience was capable of being made meaningful to others, he would have failed to accomplish a resolution vital to his spiritual life.

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[1] Moby-Dick, p. 406.

Apparently, Melville felt that he had not failed, particularly after he received a letter from Hawthorne (now lost) which showed insight into Melville's intentions:

> A sense of unspeakable security is in me this moment, on account of your having understood the book. I have written a wicked book, and feel spotless as the lamb. Ineffable socialities are in me. I would sit down and dine with you and all the gods in old Rome's pantheon. It is a strange feeling -- no hopefulness is in it, no despair. Content -- that is it; and irresponsibility; but without licentious inclination. I speak now of my profoundest sense of being, not of an incidental feeling.[1]

This passage reveals not only Melville's sense of having exorcised the religious hopes and doubts that had plagued him ("a wicked book") but also his realization that his solution was no panacea ("no hopefulness is in it"). His insight into human nature told him that man is a poor substitute for God; but he had lost all faith that man could benefit from God's plan in this life. His contentment with Moby-Dick, then, lay in his conviction that, like a statue he described in a lecture later in his life, it belonged to "that class of human aspirations of beauty and perfection that, according to Faith, cannot be truly gratified except in another world."[1] His establishment of a base of reality conforming to the limitations of human nature became a kind of sacrament, conferring upon him the freedom from religious doubt and the acceptance of man's fate that he had portrayed through Ishmael.

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[1] Letters, p. 142.

All was not well, however. For a man so concerned with the problem of moral decision in such an ambiguous world as ours, Melville's failure to involve Ishmael in any significant moral action is a serious flaw in what is, in Moby-Dick itself, a successful resolution of a literary and personal dilemma. Of course, Ishmael's approach to the world and to his fellow men does have moral implications. And Melville must have felt that his success in creating a method of seeing the world was an indispensable prelude to the task of making moral choices. His hope for that problem, as it had been in Moby-Dick, was that there was in man enough stability to allow him to use his imagination to control the chaotic world of his experience: "But even so, amid the tornadoed Atlantic of my being, do I myself still for ever centrally disport in mute calm; and while ponderous planets of unwaning woe revolve round me, deep down and deep inland there I still bathe me in eternal mildness of joy."[2] Unfortunately, in his desire to find some hope of man's potential to help himself, he forgot that the chaos of nature is mirrored in the human soul. He forgot his warning that he could no more fathom the depths of human nature than he could the forces of the physical universe. He forgot Ishmael's own warning that the examination of man's deepest being necessary to reach any certainty about the moral life might reveal less stability than one would like to believe:

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[1] Quoted in Sealts, Melville as Lecturer, p. 137.

[2] Moby-Dick, p. 326.

> Consider all this; and then turn to this green, gentle, and most docile earth; consider them both, the sea and the land; and do you not find a strange analogy to something in yourself? For as this appalling ocean surrounds the verdant land, so in the soul of man there lies one insular Tahiti, full of peace and joy, but encompassed by all the horrors of the half known life. God keep thee! Push not off from that isle, thou canst never return.[1]

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[1] _Moby-Dick_, p. 236.

Chapter VII

THE UTTER WRECK:

FIVE YEARS INTO OBLIVION

Though some be hurled
From anchor, nor a haven find;
Not less religion's ancient port,
Till the crack of doom, shall be resort
In stress of weather for mankind.
Yea, as long as children feel affright
In darkness, men shall fear a God;
And as long as daisies yield delight
Shall see his footprints in the sod.

(*Clarel*, I, xxxi, 186-194.)

In the discussion of *Moby-Dick* and of the works that preceded it, my emphasis upon one aspect of Melville's life and thought may seem to have implied that his religious doubts and opinions were primarily responsible for the genesis of each book or motivated directly the change in course which some of them took during their composition. Such a view is of course inaccurate. The idea that Melville progressed coldly and rationally from book to book in search of "clear Truth" is simply untenable. Novels are begun, influenced, changed by a man's education, his reading, his need for money, his ambition, his moods, his domestic problems, his friends, his health -- in other words, by the entire complex of his intellectual and physical life. And Melville's existence was not a narrow one. Yet it cannot be denied that religious assumptions and religious imagery permeate the body of his thought;

it cannot be denied that questions about the religious life of the individual and the universal validity of religious belief eventually surfaced in each of his first six books; it cannot be denied that the revisions which evidently were made during the writing of Mardi and Moby-Dick marked important changes not only in his artistic life but in his religious thought. And so it is reasonable to assume that the energy which Melville's quest for a religious answer to life's puzzle lent to his writing helped to lead him in the five years between 1846 and 1851 to the amazing artistic achievement of Moby-Dick.

At that point the future looked bright for Melville. He was only thirty-two years old and at the height of his powers. There was no reason to believe that the tentative resolution of his religious speculations would dissipate the energy of his mind; the world was still a puzzle and man a fascinating mixture of heaven and hell. In fact he did move on in the short stories and novels after Moby-Dick to discuss the human problems in which he had always been interested outside the religious context that had been so apparent in his first six books. But, within a period of time no longer than that in which he had risen from Typee to the heights of Moby-Dick, his public writing career was over. When The Confidence-Man was published in 1857, Melville was traveling in Europe and the Near East, on the advice of relatives and friends -- a lost and lonely man. His dream of supporting himself by his writing was very nearly ended. His attempt to make a living on the public platform during the lecture seasons of 1857 through 1860 was a failure. Of the volumes of his poetry printed during the remainder of his lifetime, only Battle Pieces (1864) was not published at his own expense. And that failed too.

What happened to Melville between 1851 and 1857 was partially financial and partially intellectual in nature. And both aspects of the problem were involved directly with the writing of Pierre. A book that received the worst contemporary reviews of all of Melville's works, Pierre is still considered a miscarriage by most critics. The materials of the novel and the themes which they generate are potentially fascinating; but Melville's treatment of them is in some places so bizarre and in general so uncontrolled that many of the book's complexities and "ambiguities" are virtually beyond rational discussion. Nonetheless, some understanding of what Melville intended and what he accomplished in Pierre is necessary if we are to see where the religious quest of his first six books finally led him.

Perhaps the first question pertinent to a discussion of Pierre is why Melville began another ambitious novel so soon after the tremendous effort of writing Moby-Dick. During the final flurry of activity on Moby-Dick he expressed the fear to Hawthorne that he should "at last be worn out and perish, like an old nutmeg-grater, grated to pieces by the constant attrition of the wood . . . ."[1] Nevertheless in September of 1851, before Moby-Dick was even published, Melville wrote to Mrs. Sarah Morewood, "the Fates have plunged me into certain silly thoughts and wayward speculations."[2] By Christmas Mrs. Morewood reported that, considering the long hours which Melville spent at his writing, he must "write under a state of morbid excitement which will soon injure his health."[3] Pierre was finished by very early spring, 1852.

Melville's decision to resume his writing so quickly seems to have been motivated by two considerations. First of all, he was in his usual financial difficulties. Redburn and White-Jacket, which he had attempted to tailor to popular tastes, had not sold as well as he had hoped. His complaint to Hawthorne in June of 1851 that "Dollars damn me"[1] was justified when, in the fall of that year, he saw that he could not afford the time to regain his mental strength and ease his frayed nerves.[2] And so, wearily, he began another book, dedicating it with some bitterness to a neighboring mountain, whether "The Most Excellent Purple Majesty of Greylock benignantly incline his hoary crown or no."[3]

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[1] Letters, p. 128. [2] Ibid., p. 138. [3] Leyda, I, 441.

Melville's second motive for writing Pierre, and certainly the impulse behind his choice of materials, was that even his achievement in Moby-Dick failed to satisfy him. "Lord when shall we be done growing?" he wrote to Hawthorne. "As long as we have anything more to do, we have done nothing. So, now, let us add Moby Dick to our blessing, and step from that. Leviathan is not the biggest fish; -- I have heard of Krakens."[4] And Melville did indeed have something to do, for the synthesis in Moby-Dick was not complete. He had established there the basis for the elemental act of human perception, insisting not that man's apprehension of reality must be accomplished in works of art but merely that it can be accomplished through an interaction of the imagination and the external world. But Melville was no aesthete; he could not be satisfied with a life of perceptions, whether communicated or not. For him, man's vision of reality had to express itself in action if it was to be truly meaningful. He indicates the vital importance of moral action in Pierre by telling the story of a priest who had overcome the suggestion of the "Evil One" that his religion was mere "moonshine":

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[1] Letters, p. 128.

[2] Leon Howard, Herman Melville (Berkeley, 1951), p. 185.

[3] Herman Melville, Pierre, edited by Henry Murray (New York, 1949).

[4] Letters, p. 143.

> The imperishable monument of his Holy Catholic Church; the imperishable record of his Holy Bible; the imperishable intuition of the innate truth of Christianity; -- these were the indestructible anchors which still held the priest to his firm Faith's rock, when the sudden storm raised by the Evil One assailed him. But Pierre -- where could he find the Church, the monument, the Bible, which unequivocally said to him -- "Go on; thou art in the Right; I endorse thee all over; go on." -- So the difference between the priest and Pierre was herein: -- With the priest it was a matter, whether certain bodiless thoughts of his were true or not true; but with Pierre it was a question whether certain vital acts of his were right or wrong.[1]

Melville's hero, unlike those of Henry James, cannot achieve a moral victory over the exigencies of life by superior perception alone. Melville needed more tangible proof that the Ishmaelean resolution of Moby-Dick was actually valid.

The speculation about Melville's intellectual and emotional motives for beginning Pierre, however, must remain more or less tentative; for it is impossible to say with any amount of certainty just what Melville's original intentions for the book were. Leon Howard's assumption that Melville changed the novel in mid-stream seems quite reasonable to me (although this theory is not accepted by all critics[2]), and it may help to explain some of our confusion over Melville's purposes. For example, there may be a measure of truth in the contention of Leslie Fiedler that the book's sentimental sensationalism was a shameless attempt on Melville's part to attract the lucrative female audience,[3] as well as in the arguments of those commentators (like Watson, Braswell, Rosenberry, and Miller) who believe that Pierre is a

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[1] Pierre, p. 240.

[2] Henry Murray, in his introduction to Pierre, seems to feel that, psychologically at least, the book is all of a piece.

[3] Fiedler, Love and Death, p. 232.

deliberate burlesque of the popular novel. Melville's amazing letter to his English publisher on April 16, 1852, in which he claims that Pierre is "very much more calculated for popularity than anything you have yet published of mine,"[1] demonstrates that he was desperate enough for money either to lie to Bentley outright or to completely deceive himself about the nature of the finished novel.[2] Thus Melville may very well have wished to write a novel acceptable to a broad segment of the reading public while at the same time employing sentimental conventions for the exploration of certain moral assumptions.

I would suggest, then, not that Melville attempted in bitterness to gull a tasteless audience but that the sentimental hero (like the intense Quaker whaling Captain in his previous book) offered him a promising medium for his "wayward speculations." By turning Pierre into a miniature, pathetically comic Ahab, he could laugh at the doubts he had exorcised in Ahab and also at the process of anguished self-questioning by which he had reached his catharsis. At the same time, he could demonstrate the necessity of an increased awareness of the complexity of life's moral dilemmas as well as the possibility of man's solving them (in a limited way) by a balance of subjectivity and objectivity similar to that created in Moby-Dick. Whether Pierre was to reach wisdom in the course of the book or to die in ignorance of his foolishness is unclear because something happened during the composition of the novel to prevent Melville from carrying out what appears to have been his original plan. What happened was that he ceased to believe that the solution to Pierre's problems was in fact possible.

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[1] Letters, p. 150.

[2] In either case, his salesmanship was unsuccessful. Bentley refused to publish the book without extensive re-writing.

Nevertheless, despite his obvious weariness, Melville seems to have written the first part of Pierre pretty much as he had intended to. For Pierre is not merely a stereotyped sentimental hero; his traits have been carefully tailored to the role he is to play. He has been raised in aristocratic ease and almost total seclusion at his hereditary estate, Saddle Meadows. Since his father's death when Pierre was twelve years old, the boy has been cared for by his proud, sophisticated mother, who neglected neither his education nor his moral instruction. He has been introduced to the wisdom and literature of the world through "his father's fastidiously picked and decorous library, where the Spenserian nymphs had early led him into many a maze of all-bewildering beauty"; and his spirit has been nourished by "the primeval gentleness and golden humanities of religion."[1] He has been taught, finally, to revere the memory of his dead father, to respect and care for his mother, and to be kind and charitable to all men.

Had the fields and hedges of Saddle Meadows been able to protect Pierre past his twentieth year as they had until he reached it, he might have lived the serene, happy life that he expected to live. But two closely related aspects of his character, primarily the results of his education and the conditions under which it was carried out, make him woefully inadequate to cope with the darker realities of the world. In the first place, his isolation from life outside Saddle Meadows has kept him ignorant of the existence of the problem of evil, much less of the tragic fact of mankind's burden of sin and suffering. As a consequence Pierre lives in a world in which the ideals of Truth, Virtue, and Honor reign by default -- not as ideals but as actualities. Early in the book, he is stirred by the beauty of the land around him; and "ten thousand mailed thoughts of heroicness started up in [his] soul, and glared around for some insulted good cause to defend."[1] But there is no cause to be found; for in the world created by Pierre's imagination, beauty is everywhere and ugliness banished. All men and women are virtuous; all good impulses are immediately (and easily) transformed into action; and all evil urges (if there are any) are stifled.

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[1] Pierre, p. 5.

Pierre's first flaw, then, is that he mistakes for universal reality the abstract dream-world which he has been led to create and allowed to believe in. His second deficiency, an almost inevitable concomitant to the first, is that he has no real contact with any human life other than his own. Unlike Ishmael, who posits the unconditional existence of the "Not-Me," Pierre sees others only in relation to himself. This does not mean that he is an egotistical monster; on the contrary, he is a likeable if irritatingly naive young man. Nor is he completely selfish. Melville is very careful to point out that Pierre is at just the proper age to be involved in an altruistic quest, the period between the instinctive heartlessness of childhood and the cold prudence of adulthood. The fact is, simply, that through small fault of his own Pierre is locked within himself. His every act of perception or relationship is in essence one of introspection or, perhaps more correctly, of self-projection.

These two aspects of Pierre's nature manifest themselves in his attitude twoard the three persons who are closest to him. With his mother's oddly defensive encouragement, Pierre remembers his father not as a man but as a paragon of gentlemanly virtue. The elder Glendinning becomes Pierre's substitute for a God whose existence he acknowledges only superficially, and thus a fallible man is trusted to be the support of "the entire one-pillared temple of [Pierre's] moral life."[1] But the book offers no evidence that there was ever any real relationship between father and son more solid than the touching death-bed scene in which the delirious Glendinning calls not for a son but for a daughter. In fact his father has become for Pierre simply another self-image, the symbol of the kind of man he wishes to be (indeed, assumes that he is). Ironically, the boy's expectations are fulfilled when, having been forced to recognize the duality of his father's nature, he is led unwillingly to acknowledge the ambiguities in his own. Pierre's mother, likewise, is less a mortal woman in his eyes than the personification of grace and beauty. Her pride, her inflexibility, her successful domination of his life go unnoticed by the boy. Rather, much to the delight of Mary Glendinning, her son treats her not as a mother but as a sister, attending to her in the manner of a Platonic courtly lover.

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[1] Pierre, p. 14.

Pierre's desire for the sister he has never had represents an instinctive attempt on his part to establish communion with another person without having to confront so gross a reality as sex. He is not even pleased with the prospect of physical intimacy with his intended wife Lucy, who seems to him an even better sister-substitute than his mother. As he does with his parents, Pierre refuses to accept Lucy as a mere human being. Instead she is a "heavenly angel," a supernatural creature that embodies man's highest spiritual aspirations. Like Yillah, however, Lucy is definitely a creature of the earth -- a sweet, innocent girl totally dedicated to the domestic values of the heart. Instinctively she realizes that noble ideals are anything but easy to achieve, and she shrinks from the heroic quests Pierre seeks in his more expansive moments. But Pierre, like Taji, is sure that once Lucy is his, he will have entered a veritable Paradise, an Eden in which passionate desires seem vaguely repulsive and out of place:

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[1] Pierre, p. 79.

> This to be my wife? I that but the other day weighed an hundred and fifty pounds of solid avoirdupois; -- I to wed this heavenly fleece? Methinks one husbandly embrace would break her airy zone, and she exhale upward to that heaven whence she hath hither come, condensed to mortal sight. It cannot be; I am of heavy earth, and she of airy light. By heaven, but marriage is an impious thing![1]

Pierre is quite willing that Lucy remain a gossamer abstraction, a living confirmation that the world of beauty and peace that he has created for himself is a real one.

Pierre's Garden, however, is invaded not so much by a tempter as by someone who unconsciously reveals to him the knowledge of good and evil. Before Pierre ever hears Isabel's vague, confused tale of her childhood recollections, he is convinced that her claim to be his half-sister is valid. On the lowest level of persuasiveness, he constructs a body of circumstantial evidence which indicates that his father could have had a child by a French emigrant. A more powerful influence upon his decision, however, concerns his father only indirectly. Pierre has long been puzzled by the difference between a portrait of his father done while he was courting the Frenchwoman and one done later. Now, having read Isabel's letter, he sees that there is a connection between the man in the earlier portrait and the one he knew as his father, that the elder Glendinning could have been both a hot young lover and a staid, almost melancholy husband:

> And yet, ever new conceits come vaporing up in me, as I look on the strange chair-portrait: which, though so very much more unfamiliar

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[1] Pierre, p. 68.

> to me, than it can possibly be to my mother, still sometimes seems to say -- Pierre, believe not the drawing-room painting; that is not thy father; or, at least, is not all of thy father. Consider in thy mind, Pierre, whether we two paintings may not make only one.[1]

The truth that Isabel's letter has unlocked for Pierre, whether her story is true or not, is so indisputable that he cannot help concluding that his father's guilt is not merely possible but actual.

The third and perhaps most subtle motive for Pierre's trust in Isabel is his recognition of the powerful attraction she has for him, a magnetism he can only explain by assuming that she is the soul-mate for whom he has been seeking, that she is his sister. Before he knows who she is, her face awakens in him a vague awareness of the mystery that lies in the depths of his being: "Himself was too much for himself. He felt what he had always before considered the solid land of veritable reality, was now being audaciously encroached upon by bannered armies of hooded phantoms, disembarking in his soul, as from flotillas of specter-boats."[2] Suddenly, he feels driven by the vision of Isabel's face to plunge into himself, to solve his own riddle. But, even before the "revelation" of his father's past, Pierre is fearful of taking such a dangerous step:

> Here, in imperfect inklings, tinglings, presentiments, Pierre began to feel -- what all mature men, who are Magians, sooner or later know, and more or less assuredly -- that not always in our actions, are we our own factors. But this conceit was very dim in Pierre; and dimness is ever suspicious and repugnant to us; and so, Pierre shrank abhorringly from the infernal catacombs of thought, down into which this foetal fancy beckoned him.[3]

Because of this fear, the deepest source of Pierre's attraction to Isabel (of which his sexual desire for her is a part) is almost hidden in his complex reaction to her story.

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[1] Pierre, p. 97. [2] Ibid., p. 56. [3] Ibid., p. 58.

Once he becomes completely convinced that Isabel is indeed his sister, Pierre understandably finds his world somewhat disrupted. He feels that all he has been taught to revere is a sham. All the beauty of the world seems tawdry; the alleged virtue of the men and women around him appears hypocritical. With bitter irony he attacks his mother for her harsh treatment of a servant girl who has borne an illegitimate child, recognizing that Mrs. Glendinning is contradicting the Christian principles she claims to support. He denounces the Reverend Falsgrave for not having the Christian courage or wisdom to speak in Delly's behalf. Having been betrayed by his dead father, by his mother, and by the representative of his religion, Pierre looks for someone to guide him to a proper course of action; and he finds only one candidate:

> "Myself am left, at least," he slowly and half-chokingly murmured. "With myself I front thee! Unhand me all fears, and unlock me all spells! Henceforth I will know nothing but Truth; glad Truth, or sad Truth; I will know what is, and do what my deepest angel dictates."[1]

Ultimately what Pierre's deepest angel dictates is that he will "pursue the heart."[2] He will leave Lucy (now replaced in her role as his "good angel" by Isabel) and protect Isabel by taking her away from Saddle Meadows in the guise of his wife.

It is at this point that the worst problems arise for Pierre, for the novel, and for Melville himself. Pierre has erred greatly in trusting himself alone, for it is precisely in the area of his deepest being that his greatest ignorance resides. As a result he is deceived about the very nature of the step he has taken. He has not in fact left behind him the abstract ideals that had formed the basis of his moral life before the advent of Isabel. In the heat of his first reaction to Isabel's letter, he announces that he "will be impious, for piety hath juggled me, and taught me to revere, where I should spurn"; but immediately he retracts his defiance in horror: "Ah! forgive me, ye heavens, for my ignorant ravings . . . ."[1] Pierre is in no way prepared to step completely outside the neatly ordered system of his imagination to face the chaos of experience unprotected. Nor, when he tells Falsgrave that he will seek his guidance "direct from God Himself,"[2] is he revealing a radically religious basis for his actions. There is no evidence that Pierre's morality was ever related to any god higher than his father. And with even that deity pulled down, Pierre does indeed depend upon himself.

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[1] Pierre, p. 76.

[2] Ibid., p. 107. This is not the "heart" which represents domesticity but that which stands for the deepest, most subtle of man's impulses.

But the "self" which Pierre trusts to be his guide requires some examination. Melville himself points out that, even before Pierre's meeting with Isabel to discuss her letter, the boy is predisposed to help her because of her beauty;[3] and presumably the same motive operates in his plan to leave Saddle Meadows with her. Merlin Bowen points out in addition that Pierre's scheme has the virtue of keeping the family name free from scandal and of avoiding an unpleasant confrontation with his mother.[4] But the springs of Pierre's impulse to "rescue" Isabel are even more muddied than such comments indicate; for Pierre's attitude toward Isabel is basically no different from his relationship with his mother or Lucy. It is still characterized by his habit of abstraction and his instinctive narcissism. In the world to which Isabel introduces him, however, these traits turn upon

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[1] Pierre, p. 76. [2] Ibid., p. 193. [3] Ibid., p. 127.

[4] Bowen, The Long Encounter, p. 172.

Pierre and slowly, inexorably destroy him.

Typically, Pierre does not treat Isabel merely as a sister, even an oppressed illegitimate sister. Rather she becomes for him a personification of all that is good; her poverty, her ostracism from normal society, the humble people with whom she must associate take on the aura of ideal beauty. Pierre has been forced, in other words, to take a view of the world different from the idealized, sugar-coated vision of his early years. But in spite of his dismay over the newly-revealed ugliness and instability of human life, he does not abandon the major premise of his former creed -- that he at least is one element of stability in a universe of flux. Thus his reaction to the truths Isabel reveals to him is to project yet another self-generated order upon his experience. His abstract values -- Truth, Virtue, Charity -- are as important to him as ever; the only difference is that, instead of trusting that they are the accepted standards of society at large, he now assumes that he must become a lonely hero defending his principles against a corrupt and hypocritical race. The struggle in Pierre's soul as he ponders what action to take concerning Isabel is not, as he proclaims, between Lucy and God[1] or even between Lucy and Isabel. It is between two appealing self-images -- the chivalrous lover and the self-sacrificing champion.

The peculiar nature of the relationship between Pierre and Isabel, however, indicates that his revised image of himself and idealization of his sister are the result of something more than habit. Nor is he attracted merely by Isabel's physical beauty. He sees in the girl a fascinating mirror image of himself, one which tempts him to plumb the dark recesses of his own being. The desire is enhanced by the fact that, after the strange, rootless existence of her early life, Isabel is attempting to come to an awareness of her own identity; and she begs Pierre to abandon his abstractions and his quest for "Truth" to confront the reality of himself: "Oh, Pierre, better, a million times, and far sweeter are mysteries than surmises: though the mystery be unfathomable, it is still the unfathomableness of fullness; but the surmise, that is but shallow and unmeaning emptiness."[1] On this level of appeal, Pierre's relationship with Isabel is basically incestuous whether she is his sister or not; for through her he is driven to merge himself totally with his own image in an attempt to forge a unity from the chaotic elements he now suspects from the substratum of his being. But Pierre is no more eager to consummate his marriage to Isabel spiritually or psychologically than he was to begin his sexual life with Lucy. As fascinated as he is by what he has begun to glimpse within himself, he is even more afraid of it; and almost every action he takes between the arrival of Isabel at Saddle Meadows and his death is an attempt to deny the truths that are being revealed to him. His struggles are futile, however, because he cannot escape himself. Having discovered something of the true nature of his father, Pierre turns the revealing chair-portrait to the wall, thus refusing to admit that his new insight has disturbing implications for his own moral nature. And just before he leaves the Meadows with Isabel, he makes the same mistake again: "Henceforth, cast-out Pierre hath no paternity, and no past; and since the Future is one blank to all; therefore, twice-disinherited Pierre stands untrammeledly his ever-present self! -- free to do his own self-will and present fancy to whatever end!"[2] Ironically, each time Pierre fails in his attempt "to do his own self-will," a little more of his protective veneer is stripped away and he is brought that much closer to the realization that he is no more stable than his father or the chaotic world around him.

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[1] Pierre, p. 213.

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[1] Pierre, p. 180. [2] Ibid., pp. 233-234.

Pierre's immersion in himself, however, does not result solely from Isabel's influence upon him. He seriously underestimates the sacrifice that is required of the protester against the hypocrisy of social norms, and as the book progresses he finds himself more and more isolated from his fellow human beings. He accepts the fact that he has alienated himself from his mother and from Lucy, probably forever. But he assumes that his cousin Glen Stanly will provide him with lodgings in the large city to which he takes Isabel and Delly in the hope of finding there a social atmosphere more tolerant than that at the Meadows. He finds neither housing nor acceptance. Stanly's door is barred to him, and the citizens of his new home treat him with suspicion, contempt, or mere indifference. Rebuffed by "normal" society, Pierre is forced to take a none-too-comfortable apartment at "The Apostles," a church which has been converted to a haven for misfit philosophers and artists. Embittered and disillusioned by this turn of events, the young man finds his heart torn even more savagely by the news that his mother is dead and that Glen Stanly, always his rival, has supplanted him as heir to the Glendinning estate and wooer of Lucy. Pierre now realizes how much he has lost by his somewhat bizarre solution for Isabel's plight. He is angry at having forfeited beautiful Saddle Meadows and the sweet Lucy to his sneering, hypocritical cousin; but he is even more deeply hurt by the loss of a mother for whom, despite the vagaries of their relationship, Pierre felt a sincere love:

> Unendurable grief of a man, when Death itself gives the stab, and then snatches all availments to solacement away. For in the grave is no help, no prayer thither may go, no forgiveness thence come;

> so that the penitent whose sad victim lies in the ground, for that useless penitent his doom is eternal, and though it be Christmas-day with all Christendom, with him it is Hell-day and an eaten liver forever.[1]

And what has Pierre gained by so great a sacrifice? Only a conviction that at the base of his decision to run off with Isabel lay an incestuous sexual attraction, a conviction that grows stronger the longer he lives with her,,a conviction that opens up to him more clearly than ever before the dizzy, black gulfs of his soul. He is still unable to see that his motives were mixed from the start, but he is now ready to admit (as he would not have done a short time before) that the pursuit of virtue can lead directly to vice. The bitterness of this discovery very nearly undermines Pierre's faith in himself forever. He gives the following explanation of ethics to Isabel, who of course knows nothing of such an abstraction as virtue:

> "Look: a nothing is the substance, it casts one shadow one way, and another the other way; and these two shadows cast from one nothing; these, seems to me, are Virtue and Vice."
> "Then why torment thyself so, dearest Pierre?"
> "It is the law."
> "What?"
> "That a nothing should torment a nothing; for I am a nothing. It is all a dream -- we dream that we dreamed we dream."[2]

Having proclaimed the total unreality of his "self," Pierre seems ready at the end of this conversation to give himself up sexually to the innocent anarchy of Isabel's unconscious; but he is not in fact prepared to accept the vision of himself and his world that he expresses here. Instead he insists on treating virtue and vice as things, as actualities which mark the boundaries of man's activity rather than as labels that are applied to the unpredictable actions of a "nothing." In other words, he tries to ignore the fact that his essentially undependable nature is the source of his moral confusion by making his ideals objects (not arbitrary standards) and then claiming that he had misunderstood them previously. Consequently, Pierre casts himself in a new role -- that of the cynical, Byronesque railer, not so much at society as at traditional beliefs:

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[1] Pierre, p. 336. [2] Ibid., p. 322.

> Ah! now I catch glimpses, and seem to half see, somehow, that the uttermost ideal of moral perfection in man is wide of the mark. The demi-gods trample on trash, and Virtue and Vice are trash! Isabel, I will write such things -- I will gospelize the world anew, and show them deeper secrets than the Apocalypse! -- I will write it, I will write it![1]

And write it he does, but even here Pierre is doomed to failure. He feels (as Melville must have felt at the beginning of many of his works) that he can accomplish two purposes by taking up the pen:

> . . . Pierre was now engaged in a comprehensive compacted work, to whose speedy completion two tremendous motives unitedly impelled; -- the burning desire to deliver what he thought to be new, or at least miserably neglected Truth to the world; and the prospective menace of being absolutely penniless, unless by sale of his book, he could realize money.[2]

However, he labors under two serious burdens which Melville (perhaps in bitterness at his own fate) spends a great deal of time explaining. First of all, though Melville indicates that Pierre has talent, the young man is immature. His early writings, the source of much literary pride, are insipid effusions devoid of any value or significance. Now, with more serious and more complex matters to write about, he struggles more or less unsuccessfully to express the thoughts that lie deep in his heart. Secondly, the praise that reviewers heaped upon his youthful works will not support him now:

> " . . . he never permits himself to astonish; is never betrayed into any thing coarse or new; as assured that whatever astonishes is vulgar, and whatever is new must be crude. Yes, it is the glory

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[1] Pierre, p. 321. [2] Ibid., p. 333.

> of this admirable young author, that vulgarity and vigor -- two inseparable adjuncts -- are equally removed from him . . . . He is blameless in morals, and harmless throughout."[1]

No longer can Pierre write so as to merit such adulation. Like Melville, he must turn to the exposition of those darker truths which are unacceptable to the mass of men. And so Pierre finds his attempt to "gospelize" the world stubbornly resisted by an angry publisher and his intention to make a living by his pen impeded in the process.

Pierre's trials are brought to a swift and violent climax by Lucy's unexpected announcement that she will join him, Isabel, and Delly at "The Apostles." She has convinced herself that Pierre is engaged in some glorious moral quest; and, in her renewed love for him, she feels that she must unite herself with him. Now he is trapped between two women, one of them totally ignorant of the nature of his predicament and the other growing daily more jealous of the angelic creature who has interposed herself between her and her "husband." And to neither can Pierre tell what is in his heart. Lucy must be kept innocent of what has happened; and Isabel can be reached only on the unconscious level which so appals her brother:

> On either hand clung to by a girl who would have laid down her life for him; Pierre, nevertheless, in his deepest, highest part, was utterly without sympathy from any thing divine, human, brute, or vegetable. One in a city of hundreds of thousands of human beings, Pierre was solitary as at the Pole.[2]

Moreover, Pierre's novel offers no relief for his overwrought soul because, as he becomes more desperate, he abandons all hope of communication by writing that which he knows will be either misunderstood or, if comprehended, indignantly rejected:

> Now he gave jeer for jeer, and taunted the apes that jibed him.

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[1] *Pierre*, pp. 288, 289. [2] *Ibid*., p. 398.

> With the soul of an Atheist, he wrote down the godliest things; with the feeling of misery and death in him, he created forms of gladness and life. For the pangs in his heart, he put down hoots on the paper. And every thing else he disguished under the so conveniently adjustable drapery of all-stretchable Philosophy. For the more and the more that he wrote, and the deeper and the deeper that he dived, Pierre saw the everlasting elusiveness of Truth; the universal lurking insincerity of even the greatest and purest written thoughts.[1]

Already near the point of total spiritual collapse, he receives a final blow to what little faith in himself remains to him. He goes to a picture gallery with Lucy and Isabel, and there he finds a portrait of an unnamed young man who looks exactly like his father. Here, for a change, Pierre sees not a mirror image of himself and Isabel but a denial of their identity. He had based much of his initial conviction that Isabel was his sister on her resemblance to him and to the chair-portrait of his father. But the painting of a man who could not possibly have been related to either of them, yet who looks like them both, destroys this last vestige of Pierre's original motivation. His very belief in his own existence as an individual human being is undermined. He is almost relieved when Lucy's brother and the hated Glen Stanly swear vengeance upon him for seducing Lucy. Driven near to madness, he accepts Glen's challenge, kills him, and dies in prison along with Isabel and Lucy.

The sentimentalism of Pierre, particularly in the last half of the book, might seem to indicate that Pierre is the noble victim of a cruel and hypocritical society. It is true that, as foolish as Pierre appears at times, Melville obviously prefers him over the indifferent or self-seeking persons who persecute him. However, Pierre is ultimately the victim of no one but himself. Initially, he falls prey to his habit of play-acting in a world of his own creation. Even assuming that he had tried to validate

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[1] Pierre, pp. 398-399.

Isabel's story instead of believing it without question, he could simply have acknowledged her publicly and weathered the storm of indignation and derision which would inevitably follow such an announcement. But his weakness, his pride, his instinct for self-aggrandizement, and his unconscious desire for Isabel prompted him to adopt a much less direct and, as it happened, more dangerous plan. As a result, Pierre passes from a pleasant life in an unreal world of his own creation to a miserable existence in a world which he can in no way make seem real. His total situation is mirrored in his final relationship with the two women who dominate the last months of his life. Before he met Isabel, Pierre treated Lucy not as a woman but as a heavenly being who embodied his highest aspirations to grace and nobility. Though she was to be his wife, he viewed their relationship as a substitute for the intimate, non-sexual communion with a sister that he had prayed for. But when the still-beloved Lucy comes to the city, Pierre must pretend that she is his cousin in order to mollify the jealous Isabel, just as he must pretend that the quest which he no longer believes to be totally altruistic is as innocent as the girl thinks it is. Moreover, Lucy has become precisely the angelic being that he had imagined her to be; and too late he recognizes that something valuable in her, something which might have been able to help him in his distress, has been destroyed:

> Thou hast torn the green heart-strings! Thou hast but left the cold skeleton of the sweet arbor wherein she once nestled! Thou besotted, heartless hind and fiend, dost thou so much as dream in thy shriveled liver of the eternal mischief thou hast done? Restore thou the green vines! untrample them, thou accursed! -- Oh my God, my God, trampled vines pounded and crushed in all fibers, how can they live over again, even though they be replanted![1]

On the other hand, the sister whose mystery seemed to mirror his own and with whom he hoped to live in pure spiritual unity has become sexually attractive to him. Just as Lucy, who should have been his wife, is transformed into the ideally virtuous sister of his dreams, Isabel becomes the wife he pretends she is. And somewhere in all this confusion Pierre's own identity is lost irrevocably.

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[1] _Pierre_, p. 374.

But the moral implications of Pierre's story do not stop short at the statement that he is the source of his own troubles, for by the end of the book all categories, metaphysical and moral, have become hopelessly muddled. Lucy, for example, is not actually Pierre's "good angel" because, as kind and self-sacrificing as she is, she never succeeds in helping him to live a meaningful human life. Isabel, likewise, is not Pierre's "bad angel," despite the fact that she leads him to his destruction. Assuming that she is not a deliberate fraud, there was nothing wrong in her asking Pierre to aid her. Under different circumstances, her struggles to emerge from her nearly pre-conscious state might even have proved useful in bringing Pierre to a better sense of reality. And as for Pierre himself -- it is at no time suggested that his motives in aiding Isabel are totally self-centered. And one cannot really say that it would have been better had he ignored her. The Plotinus Plinlimmon Pamphlet, which counsels men to follow a worldly, self-protective sort of virtue rather than the heavenly tenets of Christ, is no answer to Pierre's dilemma. In the final analysis it is not Pierre's peculiar type of enthusiastic virtue that destroys him. He is betrayed by something more essential than naive idealism, something more dangerous than his narcissism. What we find when his soul is finally laid bare by his unavoidable tendency to dive into himself is neither complete good nor complete evil. To be perfectly accurate there is not even a mixture of the two. What we find, rather, is chaos -- a total lack of the order and stability necessary for moral decision. Pierre is not two men, nor three, nor four. He is, as he says, no one. He has no moral identity. The flaws in his character have merely led him to expose this fact; and it is the growing realization that this is his situation that drives him not only to murder the man who has usurped his place in society but to kill himself. Death is the only reality left to him. And he takes with him the heavenly Lucy, who cannot endure the revelation of Pierre's true relationship with Isabel, and his soul-mate Isabel, who cannot continue to exist without him.

It should be self-evident that such a story as I have described would present overwhelming problems to any novelist; and despite some flashes of brilliance in the book, Melville fails singularly to overcome these difficulties. In the first place, the book suffers greatly from a lack of artistic control, a natural consequence of Melville's weariness after Moby-Dick and his obvious haste to finish another book. His style in Pierre has long been an object of ridicule, with its unpronounceable "-ness" words, its garbled syntax, and its bombast. The characterization, or more correctly Melville's control over our attitude toward his characters, is poorly handled. The narrator has no consistent viewpoint. Therefore, he is useless as either a direct or an ironic spokesman for Melville, and he fails to put the confused character of Pierre in a clear perspective. The second serious weakness in the book is that Pierre tends to see the world filtered through the mist of his idealism. The almost inevitable consequence of this, as E. L. Grant Watson pointed out many years ago, is that reality and unreality become hopelessly confused as the book progresses.[1] Is Isabel really

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[1] E. L. Grant Watson, "Melville's Pierre," New England Quarterly, III (April, 1930), 195-234.

Pierre's sister? How much of the persecution of Pierre by others is real, and how much does he imagine? How "good" is the good that he does; how "evil" is his evil? These are questions that cannot be answered with any certainty.

Finally, Pierre reveals much that is true about the nature of human life; he perceives and even enunciates some of it; but he consistently fails to learn from his experiences. This formula, which Melville seems to have used deliberately, causes some confusion about the extent of his agreement with his hero's attitudes. The fact is that many of Pierre's reactions to his own situation are far too naive for Melville to have approved of them. The problem is a real one, however; and it provides us with a key to what happened to Melville during and after the composition of Pierre. For while I believe that those critics (like Henry Murray) who equate Melville's attitudes with Pierre's have surrendered too fully to the confusion within the book itself, it cannot be denied that the objectivity with which Melville tried to invest his portrayal of Pierre slowly ebbs away as the novel progresses. Indeed, it becomes obvious that much of the lurid intensity which floods the end of the novel has its source not so much in Pierre's tribulations as in Melville's own distress of soul.

It is possible that Melville undermined his objectivity initially by the wealth of autobiographical material that he used in Pierre. It was quite natural that, having exhausted his sailing experiences in his first six books, Melville would turn to his own family for at least some of the components of his novel. But the book is also informed, deliberately or not, by such personal emotions as his love for his sister, his attitude toward his wife, and his bitterness over the reception of his previous works. Moreover it is quite possible that Melville intended Pierre's spiritual and moral struggles to parallel his own intellectual wanderings up to the time of Moby-Dick. With the groundwork thus laid for his identification with the scenes he was portraying and possibly for a dangerous confusion of fiction and reality in his own mind, Melville began to see a terrible implication in Pierre's experience. And at that point he lost control of his psychological and emotional reaction to what he was writing.

Melville never would have agreed with Pierre that any man can seriously consider himself absolutely stable in a world of flux. But he had assumed, in Moby-Dick, that there is some point in man's nature at which he is solid, at which he can be depended upon. And on this assumption he based the hope that semi-objective perception, and therefore communication between individuals, is possible. But upon this hope rested the possibility of meaningful moral action as well; and, like Pierre, Melville was driven to dive into the soul until he found the "one insular Tahiti" of which Ishmael speaks. Instead, to his horror, he found that there is no island, that at no place in his nature is man an integer. Pierre's Enceladus dream near the end of the novel is Melville's attempt to give symbolic form to this new vision. Initially Pierre dreams about the mountain near Saddle Meadows (modeled on Mount Greylock in the Berkshires). Those who live on the mountainside complain that the amaranth, which blooms constantly throughout the year, is steadily advancing up the mountain and killing the plants upon which the cattle graze. And as Pierre looks at the farmhouses which have had to be abandoned because of the amaranth, he sees the sweet-smelling catnip planted by the householders and soon to be destroyed with the rest. Suddenly, Pierre sees a face on the mountain -- his face -- and then a torso:

"'Enceladus! it is Enceladus!' -- Pierre cried out in his sleep."[1]

Melville himself explains Pierre's dream, and none too subtly. "The catnip and the amaranth! -- man's earthly household peace, and the ever-encroaching appetite for God."[2] If one considers Lucy and Isabel, however, it becomes obvious that the dream does not resolve itself into such a simple explanation. At first Lucy would seem to be the amaranth, symbol of the quester after heaven; but in fact she is almost completely domestic. It is Isabel, who in her sensuality seems totally a creature of the earth -- it is she who leads Pierre away from the fireside serenity promised by Lucy. As it has been from the beginning, Melville's search for God is at bottom a search for order, for stability. It makes no difference whether that search is conducted in an upward direction, toward God and man's highest ideals, or downward, into man's deepest being. Pierre is tempted to carry out both quests at once, but he is confounded in each. The reason for his failure is that man is like Enceladus, the rebellious Titan born of the union of Coelus and Terra. Significantly, the punishment meted out to him by the conquering gods consists in his being half-buried in the ground, forever able to see but not able to reach toward the heaven that he so much desires. Similarly, man's nature, a mixture of heavenly and earthly elements, is not merely pulled in two directions. Unable to find a stable order either outside of or within himself, man is totally paralyzed by the conflicting, shifting currents that compose his very being. He becomes an angry but morally impotent Titan.

The truth that man is internally divided was not, of course, a new one to Melville. He had clearly enunciated it as early as Mardi. But in

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[1] Pierre, p. 407. [2] Ibid., p. 405.

Pierre for the first time he had followed the thought to its limit and, as was usual with him, experienced it through the novel. As a result, he became more and more convinced that the resolution of Moby-Dick was a false one: man has no solid base of experience, no identity from which to challenge the potential emptiness of human life. This conviction had artistic implications as well as moral, for the same essential human stability required for moral decision is also necessary for the perception and communication of reality. Melville had tried to avoid the faults of most novelists of his time -- "their false, inverted attempts at systematizing eternally unsystemizable elements; their audacious, intermeddling impotency, in trying to unravel, and spread out, and classify, the more thin than gossamer threads which make up the complex web of life . . . . "[1] He had tried in Moby-Dick to create "that enchanter's wand of the soul, which but touching the humblest experiences in one's life, straightway it starts up all eyes, in every one of which are endless significancies."[2] But for the "enchanter's wand" to bring into being realities instead of illusions, there must be something real, something dependable in the soul itself. Pierre revealed to Melville that there is not:

> But, far as any geologist has yet gone down into the world, it is found to consists of nothing but surface stratified on surface. To its axis, the world being nothing but superinduced superficies. By vast pains we mine into the pyramid; by horrible gropings we come to the central room; with joy we espy the sarcophagus; but we lift the lid -- and no body is there! -- appallingly vacant as vast is the soul of a man![3]

And so, as the novel progresses to its violent climax, we find bitter denunciations not only of the literary climate in America but of the state of mind which drives a man to write:

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[1] Pierre, pp. 165-166. [2] Ibid., p. 335. [3] Ibid.

> Now look around in that most miserable room, and at that most miserable of all the pursuits of a man, and say if here be the place, and this be the trade, that God intended him for. A rickety chair, two hollow barrels, a plank, paper, pens, and infernally black ink, four leprously dingy white walls, no carpet, a cup of water, and a dry biscuit or two. Oh, I hear the leap of the Texan Camanche, as at this moment he goes crashing like a wild deer through the green underbrush; I hear his glorious whoop of savage and untamable health; and then I look in at Pierre. If physical, practical unreason make the savage, which is he? Civilization, Philosophy, Ideal Virtue! behold your victim![1]

But Melville's young hero is not the only victim; Pierre had found a weary, vulnerable prey, and it had struck him to the heart.

Of course, Melville never actually lost his love for literature nor his desire to write; but after Pierre he was confronted with two obstacles to the continuance of his career. The critical reception of his seventh book, while at times mixed with praise, had been extraordinarily severe: " . . . the craziest fiction extant . . . a dead failure . . . morbid and unhealthy . . . sacrilegious speculations . . . the late miserable abortion of Melville . . . Herman Melville has gone 'clean daft.'"[2] The attitude of the public was similar; and Melville could not have been considered a very promising publishing prospect in 1853. Indeed his eagerness to receive a consular appointment from the Franklin Pierce administration indicates that Melville himself felt his chances of making a living as a writer were slim. A more subtle challenge faced him as a writer, however. His youthful exuberance was gone; his faith in art as a medium of quest and of spiritual progress had died with Pierre. He was weary in body and in soul, and he appears to have been approaching a spiritual breaking point more serious than even his nervous family suspected. Moby-Dick and Pierre had taken a toll that he would not soon recoup; and the latter book had wrought a change in him from which he would never recover.

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[1] Pierre, p. 355.

[2] Hugh Hetherington, Melville's Reviewers (Chapel Hill, 1961), pp. 229, 232, 237, 232, 231, 237, 235.

Melville kept writing between 1852 and 1857, but the forms of the sketch and the short story which dominate the period demonstrate not only his diminished stature with publishers but the waning of his own ambitions. More importantly, the themes of the short stores (written between 1853 and 1856), Israel Potter (1855), and The Confidence-Man (1857) indicate that, while Melville was still capable of searching into his own heart and the hearts of others for the realities of human existence, he no longer felt that his art had the power in any way to affect those realities. As he said in Pierre: "For in tremendous extremities human souls are like drowning men; well enough they know they are in peril; well enough they know the causes of that peril; -- nevertheless, the sea is the sea, and these drowning men do drown."[1] The "Agatha" story, which Melville desperately tried to convince Hawthorne to write in the summer after Pierre was published, is a tale of unrelieved and unrewarded patience in the face of tribulation.[2] The world that Melville pictures in his stories is one that requires an abundance of patience and offers very little hope for any other remedy. The defenses that his characters oppose to the malice, the indifference, and the fears that assail them are at best only temporarily successful (as in "I and My Chimney" or "The Lightning-Rod Man"). And when they fail, a man must suffer the indignity of poverty and disease ("Cock-a-Doodle-Doo"), social injustice

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[1] Pierre, p. 357.

[2] He finally developed this theme -- in the "Encantadas" story of the Indian woman abandoned by a treacherous sea-captain on a lonely island.

("Rich Man's Crumbs" and "Temple First"), and humanity's insensitivity to the suffering in its midst ("Poor Man's Pudding"). He finds himself isolated for one reason or another from the human beings around him; yet he is terribly dependent upon them, terribly in need of a place in their society ("Bartleby," "The Piazza," and "Jimmy Rose"). His ambition, his pursuit of fame tends to corrupt him if it can and to destroy him whether or not it corrupts ("The Bell-Tower"). He might do better to be unsuccessful, to avoid by his very ordinariness the price that the quester often pays for his boldness ("The Happy Failure" and "The Fiddler"). But having taken this course he is subject to the sterile mediocrity and the dreary burdens of domesticity and industrialization ("The Paradise of Bachelors" and "The Tartarus of Maids").

"Temple Second" does surround Melville's vision of humanity with a faint glow of hopefulness. The American narrator, having been excluded from an English church because of his shabby clothes, is given a ticket to the theater. There he is not only befriended by one of the occupants of the gallery but also thrilled by a fine performance:

> The curtain falls. Starting to their feet, the enraptured thousands sound their responses, deafeningly; unmistakably sincere. Right from the undoubted heart. I have no duplicate in my memory of this. In earnestness of response, this second temple stands unmatched. And hath mere mimicry done this? What is it then to act a part?[1]

The artistic ordering of reality that the narrator has witnessed may be illusory, but its beauty and his emotional reaction to it are not. If man cannot find hope for his future in art, at least he can find a temporary but real joy. Nevertheless, even this happiness is absent from the two longest works Melville produced between 1852 and 1856 -- Israel Potter and "Benito Cereno." Israel Potter is an undistinguished adaptation of the memoirs of a young American spy during the Revolutionary War who, after serving his country on the Continent and with John Paul Jones, is exiled in England for forty years. The book is marked by the repetition of patriotic cliches, a lack of vivid detail where it is most badly needed, and a great deal of poorly written prose ("Pressing on again with all speed, day broke . . . . "). Its only merit lies in Melville's portraits of Jones and Benjamin Franklin and in his description of Potter himself -- a man who, through no fault of his own, is doomed to a lonely, frightened existence in the infernal heart of London.

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[1] Herman Melville, The Complete Stories of Herman Melville, edited by Jay Leyda (New York, 1949), p. 165.

In Israel Potter Melville had portrayed a cosmic injustice against which there is no defense; in "Benito Cereno" he creates a vision of cosmic evil that is equally hopeless. While there is in this tale some of the same carelessness which mars many of the stories, Melville sounds much more like the author of Moby-Dick than he had since 1851 or would again until Billy Budd. The setting, the imagery, and the symbolism are as evocative and arresting as they are in Moby-Dick. The characters of the Satanic slave Babo, his helpless victim Benito Cereno, and Amasa Delano, the Spaniard's naive rescuer, are clearly but suggestively drawn. And the horror of Cereno's total subjection to a violence greater than he had ever dreamed existed is skillfully counterpointed by Delano's invincible optimism:

> "You generalize, Don Benito; and mournfully enough. But the past is passed; why moralize upon it? Forget it. See, yon bright sun has forgotten it all, and the blue sea, and the blue sky; these have turned over new leaves."
>
> "Because they have no memory," he dejectedly replied; "because they are not human."
>
> . . . .
>
> "You are saved," cried Captain Delano, more and more astonished

> and pained; "you are saved: what has cast such a shadow upon you?"
> "The negro."[1]

Melville had long used the contrast between the naive innocent and the man initiated into the subtle horrors of the world to emphasize the dangers which threaten human life; but never before Pierre (and perhaps not even there) had he created such a vision of man utterly helpless before mindless violence and evil as he did in this story.

The Confidence-Man, which ended the first phase of Melville's literary production, is different from anything he had written previously. It is his only completely satiric work; and, despite the near-despair that lies at its source, it is one of his least subjective and best controlled works. Though many of its themes are conceived in savage bitterness, they are born in sophisticated irony. Melville's vision of the world has not brightened significantly since the conclusion of Pierre, and the intellectual order which disintegrated in that book has not been repaired; but he has regained his composure and reviewed his situation with some aloofness. And so The Confidence-Man is in its way more successful than Pierre in its portrayal of a world constantly on the verge of total meaninglessness. The Confidence-Man is not a readily understandable book, however, because Melville chooses somewhat defiantly to confront the ambiguities, the anarchical aspects of life that maddened him in Pierre. Indeed the three interruptive chapters (14, 33, and 44) in which Melville discusses his art concentrate on the question of life's complexity. Characters in a novel, he contends, cannot be consistent, cannot be "neat"; the life and the human nature that fiction reflects are not at all orderly. Nor can fiction reproduce "real life" as men commonly see it, for what men commonly see is only the peak of a huge iceberg. Above all, fiction attempts to confront, to challenge man's complexity, not to solve it:

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[1] Stories, pp. 351-352.

> Upon the whole, it might rather be thought, that he, who, in view of its inconsistencies, says of human nature the same that, in view of its contrasts, is said of the divine nature, that it is past finding out, thereby evinces a better appreciation of it than he who, by always representing it in a clear light, leaves it to be inferred that he clearly knows all about it.[1]

The most puzzling aspect of The Confidence-Man, of course, is the title character himself. Able to disguise himself in any fashion he chooses, the Confidence Man appears as seven different characters during the first of April voyage on the riverboat Fidèle. In each of his roles he acts as one would expect a "confidence man," in the criminal sense, to act. His only peculiarity is that money is not the motivation for his masquerades; he merely wishes to induce his "victims" to place their trust in him. Therefore the mystery of the Confidence Man lies in both his nature and his activities. His essential nature is perhaps the more easily discussed since, in a real sense, he has none. He is a true "cosmopolitan," as he finally styles himself -- he is everything and therefore he is nothing. All we see of him is accident, not substance. Clothes, features, occupations, points of view all change from role to role. The only constant in his character is his doctrine of confidence or trust; and even there we cannot know whether he speaks outside of the context of his current role. His resemblance to Moby Dick as Ishmael describes him in "The Whiteness of the Whale" -- his endless multiplicity of meanings which threatens at any moment to become total meaninglessness -- indicates that the Confidence Man is a particularly clear embodiment of "the ungraspable phantom of life." His insubstantiality and the seemingly endless variety of characteristics which he is able to project from the depths of his being do not distinguish him from the mass of men. In his individual roles, he appears quite normal, though perhaps suspicious, to those aboard the Fidèle; it is only through the fictional exaggeration of his character (which Melville attempts to justify in Chapter 33) that we see what is present but less obvious in all men.

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[1] Herman Melville, The Confidence-Man, edited by Hennig Cohen (New York, 1964), p. 73.

But if the Confidence Man is something of a mystery, his actions aboard the Fidèle are even more puzzling. One is strongly compelled, in consideration of the seemingly criminal nature of his operations, to assess them within a moral context. Most critics of the book (such as Hennig Cohen and Elizabeth Foster[1]) view the Confidence Man as an essentially evil person, but it is doubtful that his character is stable or even rationally comprehensible enough to be judged in such terms. And if the Confidence Man is evil we may have trouble accounting for the fact that most readers find themselves hoping that he will succeed in defrauding such unpleasant individuals as the cynical college student, the miser, the "soldier of fortune," Charles Noble, the transcendentalist Mark Winsome, and his pupil Egbert. And, as James Guetti points out, we have no evidence that the Confidence Man actually injures any of his victims.[2] He takes money from those who can afford it merely as token of their trust in him, and the others are not directly harmed.

Ultimately we cannot judge the Confidence Man; or, if we do, each judgment must be tentative and temporary. His usual practice is to expose the true character of his intended victim and then to use what he discovers to his advantage. To the first of these practices we can have no objection; for by reason of this function the Confidence Man fulfills the definition of a truly "original" fictional character that Melville gives in Chapter 44: "[T]he original character, essentially such, is like a revolving Drummond light, raying away from itself all round it -- everything is lit by it, everything starts up to it . . . ."[1] Thus the Confidence Man never colors, never falsifies what he finds in men; he merely illuminates. By saying that he had met Mr. Roberts before when really he had not, the Confidence Man reveals to the merchant the truth that a man cannot be positive even about his own identity. His offer of a quick profit in coal stock exposes the sophomoric pride of the college student and the insane greed of the miser. He finds a man who approves of Indian-hating on the one hand and lavishly praises the joys of friendship on the other and tricks him into revealing his unwillingness to lend money to his best friend. The only person with whom he fails utterly is Egbert, the disciple of the Emersonian Mark Winsome. Egbert, who might well have been modeled upon Thoreau, is invulnerable to the Confidence Man's normal procedure of confusing his victims by uncovering in them traits which they refuse to recognize are actually there. For Egbert is quite aware that his philosophy, which states that all men are self-sufficient and that for one man to help another is a disservice to him, is well suited to his own cold, insensitive nature. For the first and only time in the book, the Confidence Man openly attacks his intended prey and then leaves him without having won his trust.

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[1] Herman Melville, The Confidence-Man, edited by Elizabeth Foster (New York, 1954).

[2] Guetti, The Limits of Metaphor, p. 137.

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[1] The Confidence-Man, p. 261.

The only bright spot in the grim world that the Confidence Man reveals is Pitch, the backwoodsman; and it is Pitch who seems finally to offer a key to the state of Melville's mind while he wrote The Confidence-Man. The Confidence Man marks Pitch as his particular enemy from the very beginning, for the irascible woodsman constantly objects to his platitudes about the trustworthiness of religion, of man, and of nature. Nevertheless, for all his supposed cynicism, Pitch remains humane and compassionate toward his fellow creatures. Eventually, the Confidence Man discovers and preys upon the love of humanity which lies wounded and in hiding beneath Pitch's external misanthropy. He induces the woodsman to trust a man from the "Philosophical Intelligence Office" who claims to be able to use scientific methods to find an intelligent and honest boy-helper for the Missourian. But is this fraud a victory for the diabolical Confidence Man and a defeat for the poor backwoodsman? I do not believe it is. The sour but likable Pitch at one point joyfully offers to become the friend of the supposedly evil Confidence Man; for he recognizes that the Confidence Man is like himself -- a misanthropist, only one who poses as a philanthropist. And the Missourian's instincts appear to be quite accurate. The two men are similar, not only in their recognition of the world's evil but in their inability to see only that. The Confidence Man forces Pitch to admit that he wants to trust others, that he needs to. By making the Confidence Man lose his nearly untouchable composure, Egbert forces the Cosmopolitan to admit that, though he preys on men's weaknesses, he knows human beings must at some point try to help each other. And so both Pitch and the Confidence Man help mankind a little without injuring it very much. The Confidence Man tricks men into trusting one another even though he embodies the truth that no man is stable enough to be trusted; Pitch warns men to be skeptical about everyone, even though he recognizes man's basic need for human love and confidence.

Melville, then, confronted a world which had gradually become for him unreal in the sense of chaotic and undependable; and he emerged with the attitude that somehow, in the teeth of life's absurdity, life itself must continue. Despite the disillusionment, despite the anguish of soul that beset him, he refused to ignore either man's goodness and the beauty of the world or man's limitations and the disorder of the world. Perilously close to total despair, he clung to whatever values he could find in human life. But the last chapter of The Confidence-Man demonstrates that his vision had, as he said in a different context after Moby-Dick, "no hopefulness in it."

I disagree with Elizabeth Foster's contention that The Confidence-Man is saturated with allegorical religious implications, for the simple reason that Melville's whole world view, not simply his religious opinions, had disintegrated by the time of this book. There are religious elements in the book. One clergyman is satirized for trying to uphold virtue by force and another is defrauded by the Confidence Man. Moreover the Confidence Man uses religious faith as one of his arguments for trusting men; but Melville had seen long ago that religion had no such implication. The fact is that in The Confidence-Man, as in all of Melville's writing between Moby-Dick and Clarel, religion is simply one element among many (often a subsidiary one) in Melville's discussion of the human situation. But Miss Foster's thesis is surely correct as far as the end of the book is concerned; for in a chapter significantly titled "The Cosmopolitan Increases in Seriousness," Melville makes his most direct and most serious comments on religion since Moby-Dick. The Confidence Man finds an old man reading a Bible by the light of a "solar lamp," whose brightness creates a halo about his head and on whose shade is the image of an altar. The man (whom the narrator compares to Simeon, the prophet who waited for the Christ) is accosted by the Confidence Man and asked what he thinks of certain misanthropic, pessimistic passages in Scripture. The old man is bewildered and dismayed by what the Confidence Man reads him; for he has confidence in man, thinking that "to distrust the creature, is a kind of distrusting of the Creator."[1] Despite the Cosmopolitan's assurances that his trust is perfectly justified, the old man's faith is shaken; and he buys a money belt and a useless counterfeit money detector from a young boy. And then, trying to protect himself against all danger, he asks the Confidence Man to find a life-preserver for him. The Cosmopolitan supplies him with a chamber pot and then offers to take him back to his cabin. And as the book ends, "the waning light expired, and with it the waning flames of the horned altar, and the waning halo round the robed man's brow; while in the darkness which ensued, the cosmopolitan kindly led the old man away."[2]

Man can trust neither nature nor himself, then, to protect him from the dangers which surround him. In a world such as this, mankind's best and only hope is for the care and support of Providence; but God too seems to be absent from human life as far as men can understand it. And so Melville sees no hope, no defense for man to cling to. He leaves himself and his fellow creatures with only a chamber pot, a life preserver no worse in its way than religion; for of what use is the optimism of some of the New Testament or the dark wisdom of some of the Old if man can find nothing stable, nothing permanent in heaven, in the world, or in himself? Man's only resort in The Confidence-Man, as it is in many of the short stories, is that of Pitch -- to live with as much compassion and die with as much dignity as he can muster. For the world which had as its chief characteristic silence at the end of Pierre is now characterized by something more paralyzing -- darkness.

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[1] The Confidence-Man, p. 266. [2] Ibid., p. 275.

It was in darkness that Melville embarked in October of 1856 on the trip through Europe and the Holy Land which had been abandoned in 1849 because of loneliness and the lack of funds. And it was to darkness that the quest for religious faith, initiated when he began his writing career in 1846, had led him. He had followed his dream wherever it pleased to take him -- honestly, boldly, intensely -- and it had left him not only without religious faith but without hope. Hawthorne observed and recorded this fact when Melville stopped in Liverpool at the beginning of his tour:

> Melville, as he always does, began to reason of Providence and futurity, and of everything that lies beyond human ken, and informed me that he had "pretty much made up his mind to be annihilated"; but still he does not seem to rest in that anticipation; and, I think, will never rest until he gets hold of a definite belief. It is strange how he persists -- and has persisted ever since I knew him, and probably long before -- in wandering to-and-fro over these deserts, as dismal and monotonous as the sand hills amid which we were sitting. He can neither believe, nor be comfortable in his unbelief; and he is too honest and courageous not to try to do one or the other. If he were a religious man, he would be one of the most truly religious and reverential; he has a very high and noble nature, and better worth immortality than most of us.[1]

How did this happen? Why did it happen? Not, I think, because Melville dared to question orthodoxy, nor because he hated God, nor because his expectations for religion were puerile. He was overwhelmed because he did not have the power to filter from his view of the world those realities which might seriously disrupt his "philosophy." He simply saw too much evil, too much suffering, too much doubt to believe that religion had done for the world all that it should have. He asked that God speak more directly on man's level because man could not raise himself to God's. He demanded more certainty, more stability of the world than it may have been capable of giving because he found human life too valuable to consign to the vagaries of chance. Neither of his challenges was answered, and in the face of this silence he was not afraid to explore man's soul -- the last remaining hope for order and stability. He found none, and the search was over. In the last analysis, it is perhaps simplest to say that the varied elements of his character conspired with the unforeseen events of his life to bring him down, just as he saw a friend brought down in 1849:

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[1] Nathaniel Hawthorne, The English Notebooks, edited by Randall Stewart (New York, 1941), pp. 432-433.

> Poor Hoffman -- I remember the shock I had when I first saw the mention of his madness. -- But he was just the man to go mad -- imaginative, voluptuously inclined, poor, unemployed, in the face of life distanced by his inferiors, unmarried, -- without a port or haven in the universe to make. His present misfortune -- rather blessing -- is but the sequel to a long experience of unwhole habits of thought.[1]

But whatever the cause, Melville was by 1857 a "valor-ruined man." He traveled alone and despondent through Italy, Greece, Turkey, Egypt, and the Holy Land, collecting material that he would use for his lectures and for _Clarel_. At thirty-eight he may have felt the emotion he expressed later in _Clarel_:

> Prone, prone are era, man and nation
> To slide into a degradation?
> With some, to age is that -- but that.
>
> (_Clarel_, II, viii, 39-41.)

For he found himself spiritually empty yet painfully sensitive to the sufferings of others. He found himself warmed but not enkindled by the works of art that he saw. He found himself, the brave climber of masts, terrified at the top of a pyramid. He found himself, and the career into which he had poured his soul's last drop of energy, a waste, a loss, a cipher. And worst of all, he found himself a spectator of life rather than a participant, a spectator who found little joy and less hope in the drama which played itself out before his eyes. A notation from the journal of his travels in 1856 and 1857: "At dinner accosted by singular young man who speaks 6 or 8 languages. He presented me with a flower, and talked like one to whom the world was delightful. May it prove so."[1]

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[1] _Letters_, p. 83.

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[1] Horsford, Journal of a Visit to Europe and the Levant, pp. 219-220.

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